



This material has been provided by Asbury Theological Seminary in good faith of following ethical procedures in its production and end use.

The Copyright law of the united States (title 17, United States code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyright material. Under certain condition specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to finish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specific conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be *“used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.”* If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

**By using this material, you are consenting to abide by this copyright policy. Any duplication, reproduction, or modification of this material without express written consent from Asbury Theological Seminary and/or the original publisher is prohibited.**

### **Contact**

B.L. Fisher Library  
Asbury Theological Seminary  
204 N. Lexington Ave.  
Wilmore, KY 40390

**B.L. Fisher Library’s Digital Content**  
[place.asburyseminary.edu](http://place.asburyseminary.edu)



**Asbury Theological Seminary**  
205 North Lexington Avenue  
Wilmore, Kentucky 40390

800.2ASBURY  
[asburyseminary.edu](http://asburyseminary.edu)

Evelyn Underhill's Concept of Mysticism  
and Its Relation to Common Misrepresentations

by

Kendra Irons

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

1993

Approved by Reginald Johnson, Ph.D.

Department In the Theological Studies Division

Date 4/28/93

© 1993

Kendra Irons

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

B. L. Fisher Library  
Asbury Theological Seminary  
Wilmore, Kentucky 40390

## ABSTRACT

### Evelyn Underhill's Concept of Christian Mysticism and Its Relation to Common Misrepresentations

by

Kendra Irons

The purpose of this study is to examine the life and literature of Evelyn Underhill, a noted Christian mystic, in order to evaluate common misrepresentations of mysticism. This thesis begins with a biographical exploration of Evelyn Underhill and her writings. Building on this life sketch, an exploration is made of the progression of Underhill's concept of mysticism beginning with her first work, Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness, through its developing stages and culmination in her last major work, Worship. This enables the author to compare Underhill's mature understanding of mysticism with frequent criticisms of the term.

This study reveals that while certain proponents and philosophies of mysticism are rightly criticized; as a whole, it cannot be justified that mysticism is not a viable Christian term. Moreover, mysticism as Underhill espoused it, is not guilty of the numerous allegations frequently leveled. Hence, Evelyn Underhill as an example of an orthodox mystic can and does illumine spirituality within the Christian context. Therefore, it is determined that an appropriate posture to Christian mysticism is openness and receptivity juxtaposed to inherent negative predispositions.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		Page
1.	Introduction . . . . .	1
	Statement of the Problem . . . . .	1
	Review of Literature . . . . .	2
	Theoretical Framework . . . . .	11
	Definition of Terms . . . . .	11
	Presuppositions . . . . .	12
	Delimitations . . . . .	13
	The Method of Procedure . . . . .	14
	Justification for the Study . . . . .	15
2.	The Life and Writings of Evelyn Underhill . .	17
	The Younger Years: 1875-1911 . . . . .	17
	Formative events . . . . .	17
	Early publications . . . . .	22
	Mysticism . . . . .	23
	The Middle Years: 1912-1925 . . . . .	27
	Crisis and direction . . . . .	30
	Retreats . . . . .	35
	Publications . . . . .	37
	The Mature Years: 1926-1941 . . . . .	43
	Publications . . . . .	43
	Final years . . . . .	52
3.	Mysticism . . . . .	57
	Historical Background . . . . .	57
	Underhill: Authority on Mysticism . . . .	60

Mysticism in the Early Years . . . . .	63
Mysticism as a Developing Concept . . . . .	70
Evidence from <u>Practical Mysticism</u> . . . . .	70
Evidence from five important articles . . . . .	72
Evidence from <u>Worship</u> . . . . .	81
Conclusion . . . . .	82
4.    Misconceptions of Mysticism . . . . .	85
Kataphatic and Apophatic Methods . . . . .	85
Kataphatic . . . . .	85
Apophatic . . . . .	86
Misconceptions Outlined and Considered . . . . .	88
Misconceptions outlined . . . . .	91
Misconceptions considered . . . . .	91
Conclusion . . . . .	104
5.    Summary, Conclusion, and Suggestions for Further Study . . . . .	107
Summary . . . . .	107
Conclusion . . . . .	109
Suggestions for Further Study . . . . .	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	113

## CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

The concept of Christian mysticism has come under much scrutiny. Unfortunately, most of it is founded on inaccurate and uninformed assertions. As a student interested in spiritual formation, such false notions cannot be left unsettled. A concept so basic to Christian heritage demands serious attention. It is this writer's aspiration to study this concept with the intention of redeeming its position as a viable Christian notion. The writer does not believe that negative criticism should halt discussions on Christian mysticism. Moreover, Christian scholars should restore its original meaning and intention, with the goal of more fully recognizing it as an integral element of the Church's orthodox teaching.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the life and writings of Evelyn Underhill, a noted Christian mystic, in order to explore common misconceptions regarding Christian mysticism. The first sub-problem will be to examine the life and writings of Evelyn Underhill in her historical context. This undertaking will illumine Underhill's concept of mysticism as she lived and espoused it. The second sub-problem involves determining the approach Underhill took to Christian mysticism. The writer is aware that there are almost as many definitions of this term as authors who have

written about it. Therefore, this study will explore only one person's approach; that of Evelyn Underhill. Finally, the third sub-problem addresses the misconceptions of Christian mysticism which can be dispelled based on Underhill's understanding of it.

### Review of Literature

The problem statement requires that consideration be given to an examination of the life and writings of Evelyn Underhill in light of the cultural and spiritual climate in which she lived and contributed. Also, it includes reflection on the concept of mysticism as it was frequently understood in Underhill's era, as well as delineated today. This, then, will enable one to learn of apparent misconceptions of the term, according to the life and teachings of this noted orthodox authority. This review of literature will briefly consider the sources which will be of tremendous value in seeking information to solve the stated problem.

Until recently, little had been written regarding Evelyn Underhill and her contribution to all of Christendom. Fortunately, however, many have experienced a renewed interest in the spiritual life; and thus, have turned to one of the outstanding leaders in this area--Evelyn Underhill. Therefore, this review of literature will contain numerous works written by those who have closely studied different aspects of Underhill's life; as well as a cursory look at



several important manuscripts written by Underhill, which will be covered more thoroughly later in this thesis. Moreover, to add depth and perspective to this study, the author will quickly highlight sources that place Underhill in her historical framework. Finally, since this study involves understanding her concept of mysticism, a brief consideration of works which treat the same subject must be accomplished.

Presently, the most comprehensive biography written about Evelyn Underhill's life was written by Margaret Cropper. It details her life from childhood and early discoveries to her first major work, Mysticism; through the many developments that led to her last major work, Worship; and finally to her contributions as a retreat leader and a glimpse at her "last years." Another highly valuable source is Evelyn Underhill written by Christopher Armstrong. This book seeks to retell the life of Underhill with emphasis given to explaining her works along the way. Thus, it is an indispensable exploration of the development of her thought and ideas in the context of her life. Other shorter biographies are available. Lucy Menzie's "Memoir" in Light of Christ focuses on Underhill's life as a retreat leader. In addition, Charles Williams has an "Introduction" written in The Letters of Evelyn Underhill which further illumines her life. Likewise, Thomas Kepler devotes the "Introduction" in his book, The Evelyn Underhill Reader, to

a discussion of her life and writings. Furthermore, Bishop Lumsden contributes an "Introduction" to Life as Prayer which examines "the development of her enlarging mind as she gave utterance to her deepest convictions."<sup>1</sup> These sources provide pertinent information about her life which inform her work. In other words, one cannot critique her work apart from an understanding of her life. Thus, these resources will be inestimable in this attempt to examine her writings. Out of this study, consideration to the first sub-problem, an examination of Evelyn Underhill's life and writings, will be accomplished.

In addition to biographies, journal articles have been published which seek to briefly examine Evelyn Underhill's development as witnessed through her writings. Of these, two are contributed by Dana Greene. The first article entitled, "Adhering to God: The Message of Evelyn Underhill for Our Times," traces Underhill's exploration of mysticism and the spiritual life in terms of holiness. The second, "Toward an Evaluation of the Thought of Evelyn Underhill," suggests that Underhill's life and writings must be re-examined on a continuum because of her continual transformation of thought that so ostensibly characterized her life. Also, Fay Campbell has produced an article,

---

<sup>1</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., Ltd., 1946); reprinted as Life as Prayer: and Other Writings of Evelyn Underhill, ed. Lucy Menzies (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), 13.

"Evelyn Underhill: Conversion at Pleshey," which explores this pivotal event in her life from Campbell's perspective. Likewise, Douglas Steere writes about what he considers to be Underhill's mid-life crisis in Chapter 3 of Gleanings: A Random Harvest. On different topics, other journal articles are informative regarding various aspects of Underhill's life and work. "Evelyn Underhill" by Michael Ramsey explores the development of the concept of mysticism in her life. Also, of great interest is Grace Adolphsen Brame's piece called "Continuing Incarnation: Evelyn Underhill's Double Thread of Spirituality" which highlights the following as the theme of Underhill: "offering one's life as the channel for God's continuing work on earth by weaving together the inner and outer life of the spirit."<sup>2</sup> "Great Pastors--X. Evelyn Underhill" by Lumsden Barkway seeks to establish her as a pastor because of her prolific writing and the direction she offered many upon request. J. Henry Bodgener also writes about Underhill as a director. His article is entitled, "Evelyn Underhill--Spiritual Director to Her Generation" found in the London Quarterly and Holborn Review. Finally, an interesting article on her poems is presented by Orlo Strunk, Jr. entitled "The Religious Verses of Evelyn Underhill." It provides a look at her early verses which reveal the central themes which were woven

---

<sup>2</sup>Grace Adolphsen Brame, "Continuing Incarnation: Evelyn Underhill's Double Thread of Spirituality," The Christian Century 107 (Oct. 31, 1990): 997.

throughout the fabric of her life. Similar to the biographies and introductions aforementioned, these sources will provide constructive information regarding Evelyn Underhill's life and development as evidenced through her various writings. Thus, the author is better equipped to evaluate Underhill's understanding of mysticism as she believed, taught, and lived. Structurally, this material will be considered under the first sub-problem.

While Evelyn Underhill wrote quite extensively, the scope of this thesis does not allow the author to thoroughly delve into each piece. Therefore, those works which best display her development of thought will be examined. These will, in turn, provide the framework to explore the progression in her understanding and practice of mysticism. In terms of structure, this information will be used in the second and third sub-problems. Obviously, the first book deserving attention is her first major work, Mysticism. She undertakes two purposes. The first (The Mystic Fact) is to show the relationship of mysticism to Vitalism, psychology, theology, symbolism, and magic. The second purpose (The Mystic Way) is to explain the inner processes of the developing mystic. Shortly after Mysticism, Underhill wrote The Mystic Way and Practical Mysticism. The Mystic Way delivers what the sub-title promises: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins. Moreover, the major theme in many of Underhill's writings, and especially in Practical Mysticism,

according to Dana Greene is that "mysticism, an essential element in all religion, is available to everyone."<sup>3</sup>

The Life of the Spirit and the Life of To-Day is a collection of her Oxford lectures on the spiritual life. Also, many of her retreat addresses have been gathered and presented in book form. These include: Concerning the Inner Life, The House of the Soul, The Golden Sequence, The Mount of Purification, Light of Christ, The School of Charity, The Mystery of Sacrifice, Abba, and Fruits of the Spirit. These reveal the depth of Evelyn Underhill wrapped in her "down-to-earth" presentation.

Three anthologies of various essays and lectures have also been compiled. They are called, Mixed Pasture, The Essentials of Mysticism, and Collected Papers [Life as Prayer]. These display the wide breadth she had and her ability to write on a large number of topics ranging from "The Teacher's Vocation" to "Will, Intellect and Feeling in Prayer." Also significant is The Letters of Evelyn Underhill which reveals the direction and insight she frequently offered those in need. Moreover, of tremendous importance is Underhill's last major work, Worship. In it, she examines various characteristics of worship and then explores the different traditions of the West. This work displays the culmination of her thought from the beginning

---

<sup>3</sup>Dana Greene, "Bibliography of Works About and By Evelyn Underhill," Bulletin of Bibliography 45 (June 1988): 92.

stages found in the verses and Mysticism to the climax in Worship.

Three articles in The Hibbert Journal prove helpful for this study. "Our Two-Fold Relation to Reality" discusses experience in terms of the concrete historical and the timeless supernatural. "Sources of Power in Human Life" delves into the spiritual life of which the mystics are quite familiar. And, "Problems of Conflict" discusses the problems of war. (This is especially interesting since Underhill wrote on the spiritual life between the two world wars.) Each of these sources mentioned will contribute to our pool of information, helping to piece together elements of Underhill's thought which will comprise part of the discussion under the first sub-problem. Moreover, drawing on these elements, discoveries regarding her understanding of mysticism will become evident. This will then enable the author to examine this concept, as juxtaposed to other understandings of it, which composes the foci of the second and third sub-problems.

To add depth and perspective to this study, the climate in which Evelyn Underhill wrote must be examined. Paul Marshall has written a chapter entitled "Anglican Spirituality" in Protestant Spiritual Traditions which seeks to relate the unique contributions of Anglicanism to all of Christendom. Furthermore, T. H. Croxall has written the article "Anglicanism and the Incarnation." Also, Regina M.

Bechtle includes a chapter in her dissertation, "The Mystic and the Church in the Writings of Evelyn Underhill," on the historical perspective of Evelyn Underhill. These sources will provide the necessary material to place Underhill in her historical background. This information will be drawn upon for an accurate examination of the life and writings of this mystic in the first sub-problem.

To broaden this study of mysticism and detail frequent criticisms of it, other, more recent works will be considered. This undertaking will complete the framework for examining mysticism; thereby enabling one to draw conclusions from discrepancies between Underhill's conception and other noted opinions. What are They Saying about Mysticism? by Harvey D. Egan is a consideration of the current scholarship of mysticism. It includes a discussion on Evelyn Underhill. Also, Mysticism: Window on a World View by Margaret Lewis Furse provides an introduction to mysticism as a pattern of thought and practice. Mysticism: An Evangelical Option? by Winfried Corduan seeks to construct a middle path between complete rejection and complete acceptance of Christian mysticism. In addition to these books, an introduction by Harvey Egan in his book, An Anthology of Christian Mysticism, outlines mysticism as a movement toward union with God and attempts to address common misconceptions regarding this process.

Furthermore, many journal articles have been written on

mysticism. "Mysticism and the Christian Experience" by Otto A. Piper differentiates between "Protestant mysticism" which, according to him, is a movement from lower to higher values and "existential mysticism" which he determines as an assertion of dissociation. With this differentiation in mind, the author then seeks to determine how closely each are related to the Christian faith. "Mysticism--What is It?" by Georges A. Barrois is an article written because of the many misconceptions regarding mysticism in hopes of "rehabilitating" mysticism as an essential function of faith. Each of these articles will add depth to this study of mysticism, while also suggesting possible common misconceptions of mysticism; which is a driving force of the third sub-problem in this thesis.

Behind the concept of mysticism is a larger debate. This struggle involves two different avenues to obtaining knowledge of God. The first is called the apophatic way which stresses the negative; what God *is not*. The other is called the kataphatic way which stresses the positive; what God *is*. Thus, discussion on this level is imperative for our study. Information germane to this investigation will be taken from three sources. The first is composed of respective entries from The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology. The second is an interesting discussion from Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction by Tilden Edwards. And, the third is also a brief



discussion on the topic from Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality by Kenneth Leech. Each of these sources offer basic characteristics of each path, and reiteration of the need that they be integrated together; rather than separated and one applauded while the other is rejected. Again, this information will contribute to the third sub-problem.

A careful examination of the sources listed in this review of literature will lead to a fruitful study of the following purpose statement: To examine the life and writings of Evelyn Underhill, a noted Christian mystic, in order to explore common misrepresentations regarding Christian mysticism.

### Theoretical Framework

#### Definition of Terms

Unless otherwise noted, mysticism as used in this thesis assumes a Christian connotation since this is the concern and context of this study. A full definition of mysticism will be considered in the second chapter. However, a guiding definition of the term according to Evelyn Underhill, and which will apply throughout this study, is "the art of union with Reality".<sup>4</sup>

Spiritual formation is the discipline which considers the theological and practical aspects of the spiritual life.

---

<sup>4</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Practical Mysticism (1914; reprint, Columbus: Ariel Press, 1987), 23.

Mysticism, as an integral aspect of the spiritual life, offers the student in spiritual formation understanding of a way of life in which to seek God.

The spiritual life as Underhill defined it and as will be used in this thesis is, "simply a life in which all that we do comes from the centre, where we are anchored in God: a life soaked through and through by a sense of His reality and claim, and self-given to the great movement of His will."<sup>5</sup> Thus, to speak of the spiritual life is not to suggest that it is juxtaposed to the practical part of life, as if the two can be separated. It is a life of wholeness and integration, devoid of any presumed attempts of compartmentalization.

#### Presuppositions

The author is not concerned with debating the authenticity of mystics and their claims. It is presupposed that the mystical approach to God is not only genuine, but also appropriate and valid. Mysticism in this thesis will be considered as a positive aspect of religious life, and will not be subject to philosophical argumentation.

It must be acknowledged that many proponents of mysticism have contributed to its negative connotations by either their ecstatic extremes or their failure to remain connected to the Church. These negative examples, however,

---

<sup>5</sup>Evelyn Underhill, The Spiritual Life (1937; reprint, Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, n.d.), 32.

should not halt authentic study of genuine mystics. It is the writer's conviction that numerous Christians are unaware of accurate characteristics of mysticism, and even suppose it to be synonymous with the occult. Therefore, this study presupposes the following distinctives of mysticism to be generally accepted. A mystic is a person seeking knowledge of God through immediate experience. The mystic has a realization of deeper levels of meaning in life governed by intimate Love. Furthermore, union with God is the ultimate and attainable goal in this life.

#### Delimitations

Due to the limits of time and space, in-depth studies of divergent views of mysticism will not be feasible. It is recognized that the figure of focus for this study is only one of the major contributors to the pool of information on the mystical aspect of the spiritual life. Nevertheless, attention to these figures must be merely cursory in order to give appropriate consideration to Evelyn Underhill.

Secondly, it must be noted, that the parameters of this study do not encompass a full-scale exploration of mysticism as an approach to interpreting religious experience. Such a study would thoroughly consider the fundamental positions of apophatic and kataphatic traditions. While the author will briefly mention these approaches to mysticism in Chapter 4, a complete historical and analytical sketch is not possible.

Thirdly, the hermeneutic principles of mysticism are

beyond the scope of this thesis. It is granted that various criticisms of attempted communication from mystics regarding their experiences of God exist. However, the demarcations of this study simply do not allow for fruitful consideration of these hermeneutics.

Additionally, for the sake of preserving quotation materials as written by Underhill, they are not altered to reveal inclusive language sensitivities of our time. However, it is understood that all references Evelyn Underhill made to man and mankind do include women; and are merely representative of the cultural climate in which she lived and contributed.

#### The Method of Procedure

For this study, the author intends to describe the important and formative events in the life of Evelyn Underhill. Interspersed with these events will be observations related to her literary accomplishments. It is intended that reflection on her life and her writings be simultaneous because of their integral connection. First, consideration will be given to her younger years which culminated in her first masterpiece, Mysticism (1875-1911). Then, pertinent issues will be discussed regarding her middle years with special attention given to what Douglas Steere has termed, her "mid-life transformation"<sup>6</sup> (1912-

---

<sup>6</sup>Steere, Douglas V., Gleanings: A Random Harvest (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1986), 55-71.

1925). Finally, attention will be given to her mature years and lasting contributions (1926-1941). For this chapter, the author has consulted the majority of the works written about Evelyn Underhill, and many of the works, with the exception of the numerous book reviews, written by Underhill.

With this biographical study in mind, the author proposes to make some determinations with regard to Underhill's conceptualization and practice of mysticism. These assertions will enable the author to draw positive conclusions about the nature and function of mysticism in the life of an orthodox Christian.

Drawing from the conclusions found, the author plans to address misconceptions regarding mysticism which are frequently espoused. Information germane to this section and the previous will be drawn from primary sources of Underhill and also the noted sources of mysticism aforementioned in the Review of Literature.

#### Justification for the Study

At this crucial time in history, the New Age movement and occult practices are plaguing American society. With the rampant questioning of old doctrines and traditions, the mood is swinging to a more interested position regarding personal experience which often involves dabbling in cult religions and the occult. It is critical, therefore, that Christians be informed about the truth of Christian

mysticism and the falsities of these pagan religions. They are not to be understood as identical, or even similar; though this is commonplace.

Moreover, numerous leaders are convicted that a spiritual renewal of untold proportions is imminent, and, perhaps, even in the early stages. A renewal of this magnitude will likely include an emphasis on spiritual formation. This will require an accurate understanding and espousal of mysticism. Therefore, a study seeking to demonstrate the positive contributions of this aspect of the spiritual life is timely.

As of secondary interest, is the illustration that through the history of the Church, women have made significant contributions. In the past, their legacies have been left either untold, or given merely cursory coverage. This study will contribute to the pool of information giving a more accurate account of Church history.

## CHAPTER 2

## The Life and Writings of Evelyn Underhill

"The death of Mrs. E. Stuart Moore (Evelyn Underhill) at the age of 66 brings to mind for many of us a debt of long standing. She took a place among our students of mysticism with von Hügel and Dr. Inge."<sup>1</sup> This obituary which appeared in The Christian Century displays the influence Underhill had on her contemporaries. What it does not reveal, is the influence she has had on those who have followed after her death. The scope of her contributions is enormous, and perhaps can never be fully measured. Nevertheless, this chapter is dedicated to exploring the life and writings of this "Noted English Mystic."<sup>2</sup>

The Younger Years: 1875-1911

Formative events. Evelyn Underhill was born to Sir Arthur and Lucy (Ironmonger) Underhill in Wolverhampton, December 6, 1875. Little light has been shed on Miss Underhill's childhood, for it seems she spoke little of it, even in later years. It is generally noted that she had somewhat of a lonely existence, being the only child; though, she also enjoyed the security of caring parents. At the age of ten, she went away to a boarding school at Folkestone. She returned home when she was sixteen. Aware

---

<sup>1</sup>"Evelyn Underhill, Mystic and Religious Thinker," The Christian Century 23 (July 1941): 941.

<sup>2</sup>"Evelyn Underhill, Mystic and Religious Thinker," 941.

of this turning point in her life, young Underhill wrote the following in a small black book: "I am going to write down this short account of my own feelings and opinions because I think that tomorrow will close a period of my life, and I want to preserve some memory of its before it quite goes away."<sup>3</sup> Demonstrating her avid mind, she related her convictions and preferences for ideals, literature, religion, and goals; of which writing is mentioned for its possible influence.<sup>4</sup> She closes this entry with a statement which, as will become evident, informs her throughout the remainder of her life. "Goodbye sixteen years old. I hope my mind will not grow tall to look down on things, but wide to embrace all sorts of things in the

---

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Cropper, The Life of Evelyn Underhill (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1958), 4.

<sup>4</sup>Following is an excerpt from this entry which details her attitude toward religion at this date:

"As to religion, I don't quite know, except that I believe in a God, and think it is better to love and help the poor people round me than to go on saying that I love an abstract Spirit whom I have never seen. I do not think anything is gained by being orthodox, and a great deal of the beauty and sweetness of things is lost by being bigoted and dogmatic. If we are to see God at all it must be through nature and our fellow men. Science holds a lamp up to heaven, not down to the Churches.

I don't believe in worrying God with prayers for things we want. If He is omnipotent He knows we want them, and if He isn't, He can't give them to us. I think it is an insult to Him to repeat the same prayers every day. It is as much as to say He is deaf, or very slow of comprehension.

I do not believe the Bible is inspired, but I think nevertheless that it is one of the best and wisest books the world has ever seen." Cropper, 5-6.



coming year".<sup>5</sup> The remainder of her formal education was received at King's College for Women in London. She studied botany and languages, followed by philosophy and social science.<sup>6</sup>

Sir Arthur and Lucy were nominal Anglicans; and thus, Evelyn did not develop her alliance with the Church from familial influences. Her father's brother was an Anglican priest. However, it does not seem that he had any special influence on the young Underhill. Her confirmation occurred at Christchurch, Folkstone, on March 11, 1881. For Underhill, however, it lacked any substantive significance, and was mainly an opportunity to visit with her parents.

Evelyn developed an interest in bookbinding. Her zeal for expert craftsmanship was displayed in her work and later was to be a point of shared interest between herself and her husband. She also had a tremendous love for animals, especially cats. They surrounded her throughout her life, and it is told that when she was relaxing at home in the evenings, a cat could always be found snuggling close to her.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Cropper, 6.

<sup>6</sup>Cropper, 8.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Williams, ed. The Letters of Evelyn Underhill (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1989), 29.

Baron von Hügel, who was to become Evelyn Underhill's spiritual director later in life, commended Underhill for her love of these creatures. In a 1921 letter to her he stated, "I much like your love for your cats. I deeply love my little dog; and Abbé Huvelin was devoted to his cat. We all three

Early in her life, young Underhill shared her parents' passion for sailing. She accompanied them on several excursions aboard the Amoretta. It is noted that she even became a small-boat sailor who raced, often as a serious contender. This appreciation for the outdoors and nature continued to be nurtured throughout her life as can easily be deduced from letters which she wrote various friends when she was abroad. In them she detailed flowers, birds, architecture, paintings, and similar wonders. According to Cropper, Underhill's discovery at this time included a realization that "Beauty and Truth had an intimate and perpetual harmony".<sup>8</sup> And it was probably this conviction that drove her in her tireless quest for intellectual and spiritual integrity.

Her early letters from her various travels also reveal the love she had for Hubert Moore, a childhood friend. It has been suggested that she took a rather "mothering" approach in their relationship. The following excerpt substantiates this notion: "I got your letter this morning; **dearest** I **do** hope you are not very lonely and are going to have a nice happy healthy time. Oh, **do** be careful of yourself. . . . Do **do**, my sweetest boy, have all the fresh air and exercise you can, and avoid chills and being run

---

can and will become all the dearer to God for this our love of our little relations, the smaller creatures of God."

<sup>8</sup>Cropper, 24.

down."<sup>9</sup> After a lengthy engagement, Miss Underhill married her long-time friend, Hubert Stuart Moore, a barrister, in 1907. Though they never had any children, it appears that their relationship was full of enchantment and companionship. Margaret Cropper concurs that, "They had enough of common interest in their love of good architecture and craftsmanship and in their delight in the countryside."<sup>10</sup>

Regarding their religious beliefs, Hubert and Evelyn experienced one potential problem. Hubert apparently had definite objections to Evelyn's early interest in leaving the Anglican fellowship to join the Roman Catholic Church. He felt that due to the confessional, their marriage would consist of three persons, and that was not acceptable to him. To solve this difficulty, Evelyn agreed to put her religious pursuits to rest, at least for the present. Her letter of 1907 to Hubert suggests that the difference would not be a barrier keeping them from pursuing marriage. Evelyn wrote,

My own darling boy, I was so glad to get your letter at Arezzo this morning: I only hope you are telling me the truth and are really feeling purry and closer to one another in spite of the "depression." After all, as I have thought as I now think for many months, if it was to separate us you ought to have felt it coming on long ago and as the chief result has been to force us to talk openly to each other about all the real

---

<sup>9</sup>Williams, 47.

<sup>10</sup>Cropper, 40.

things which we sedulously kept from each other before, the final effect in spite of difference of opinion ought to be to make us much more real companions than in the past, when we each had a watertight bulk-head carefully fixed to prevent undue explorations.<sup>11</sup>

Underhill's desire to become Roman Catholic never was fulfilled. Shortly after their wedding, the Modernist controversy<sup>12</sup> arose, and Evelyn could not bring herself to sacrifice her intellectual convictions in order to join the Communion. Thus, she elected to attend Catholic Mass devoid of communion. This resolution Underhill followed until she finally committed herself to the Anglican tradition. Since Evelyn never conceded to the Roman Catholic position, it never again posed difficulties for the Hubert Moore's. Moreover, even though Hubert never displayed much interest in religion, and Evelyn's quest for God increased, these differences apparently did not serve as material for marital discord.

Early publications. By the time of her marriage to Mr. Moore, Underhill had published The Bar-Lamb's Ballad Book in 1902, The Grey World in 1904, and The Lost Word in the year of their marriage. Shortly, after The Column of Dust went to print in 1907, her work was focused on her colossal project, Mysticism. Drawing on careful examination of

---

<sup>11</sup>Williams, 58-59.

<sup>12</sup>Conflict between the Vatican and Modernists arose over biblical criticism. Underhill considered herself a Modernist, and therefore could not give her allegiance to the Papacy which opposed her intellectual convictions.

Underhill's early writings (1903-1909), Armstrong suggests that the theme of mysticism and incarnation is dominant.<sup>13</sup> It is not surprising, then, that mysticism is the subject of her next work. While her previous dapplings in poetry and prose had been fairly successful, it was Mysticism that elevated Underhill to a place of distinction.

Mysticism. Where did Underhill's interest in mysticism originate? It is generally thought that though all people have the capacity for mystical experience, certain personalities cultivate a natural predisposition toward mysticism; and, it seems plausible that this was true for Evelyn Underhill. Furthermore, she had a keen interest in philosophy, and enjoyed an atmosphere which fostered this pursuit, both with her father and then her husband. It is also mentioned by several that for a time, Underhill was a member of the "occultist brotherhood of the Golden Dawn."<sup>14</sup> Though no records exist to suggest the length of time she was involved in this group, her lack of promotion in the order suggests that it was not a very lengthy period. However, to add context to this "blemish" on Underhill, it must be acknowledged that this group included church members, and even several High Anglicans. As Armstrong

---

<sup>13</sup>Christopher J. R. Armstrong, Evelyn Underhill: An Introduction to Her Life and Writings (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 90.

<sup>14</sup>Armstrong, 36. For additional information refer to his full discussion, 36-51.

surmises, this group appears to be something that a young person with mystical tendencies and no particular allegiance to the Church would find appealing.<sup>15</sup> This information confirms Dana Greene's analysis that Underhill became engaged in mysticism through philosophy and the occult.<sup>16</sup>

Mysticism involves two sections. The first examines mysticism in relation to Vitalism, psychology, theology, symbolism and magic. This Underhill termed the Mystic Fact. She then turned to the Mystic Way and described the stages of development for the mystic. Rather than using the classic three stages of mystical progression (Purgation, Illumination, Union), she expanded this paradigm to five stages: Awakening of the self, Purgation, Illumination, the Dark Night, and the Unitive Life. This work is not only completely thorough, it displays Underhill's passion for the subject, not as an abstract theory, but as a way of life. It reflects the personal searching of its author. Greene highlights this fact. "The power and authenticity of Mysticism are linked to the fact that this book was not a detached, objective study of mystic texts, but a highly interpretive and personal examination born of an

---

<sup>15</sup>Armstrong, 37.

<sup>16</sup>Dana Greene, "Adhering to God: The Message of Evelyn Underhill for Our Times," Spirituality Today (Spring 1987): 26.

intellectual crisis in her own life."<sup>17</sup>

At the time of its publication, England was in the throes of several "discoveries." Religious orthodoxy was being confronted by science, psychology, technology, and biblical criticism. These new advances were bringing into question the authenticity of religion based on creeds and Scripture. Therefore, even though mysticism was still suspect, it held a fresh perspective with its emphasis on personal religion. Underhill was not the first in England to write on mysticism. William Inge published Christian Mysticism in 1899, and Friedrich von Hügel actively explored mysticism through his study of St. Catherine of Genoa. However, it was Underhill, through Mysticism and several subsequent works, that made this concept widely known.

Many trace Underhill's conversion to 1907. She reflects on this event in her diary on May 14, 1911: "a good deal shaken but unconvinced, I was 'converted' quite suddenly, once and for all, by an overpowering vision which had really no specifically Christian elements . . ."<sup>18</sup> This explains why she included Christian and non-Christian mystics in her classic volume. In fact, in her Preface to the first edition, she defines mysticism as ". . . the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit

---

<sup>17</sup>Dana Greene, "Toward an Evaluation of the Thought of Evelyn Underhill," History of European Ideas 8, no.4/5 (Spring 1987): 552.

<sup>18</sup>Williams, 13.

towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, writing to Margaret Robinson, who supplied Underhill with translations and pertinent details beyond the scope which Underhill felt capable to pursue, she said of her intentions, "the book is not going to be explicitly theological as I want to make a synthesis of the doctrine of Christian & non-Christian mystics--so no 'over-beliefs' are admissible."<sup>20</sup>

Baron von Hügel's positive response to Mysticism pleased Underhill; as she felt him to be an important proponent of mysticism. Generally, he thought it to be a good work, though some passages and approaches gave him pause. Their correspondence over this subject precipitated their direction relationship to occur some years later. It must be mentioned that the Baron readily recognized the influence Underhill would assert as established in an early letter to her. He wrote,

. . . I have long felt how large is your public--how many souls will be led right or wrong by yourself, and with your rare charm of style, large knowledge of literature, and delicate interestingness of character. . . . Hence, I rejoice, I believe [,] more fully than if I discovered some growth in myself--for you can and do reach more people than I can ever expect to

---

<sup>19</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness 12th ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1990), xxi.

<sup>20</sup>Armstrong, 104.



reach myself.<sup>21</sup>

The Middle Years: 1912-1925

The success of Mysticism did not deter Underhill from more study and construction on mysticism. The same year in which her masterpiece was released, she composed The Path of Eternal Wisdom: A Mystical Commentary on the Way of the Cross. This was published under the pseudonym "John Cordelier." Additionally, in 1912, she sent The Spiral Way to the publishers. It was a short devotional book based on events in the life of Jesus as they relate to the soul's ascent. As the earlier publication, this was also pseudonymous. Presumably, Underhill felt these works to be somewhat weaker contributions, and thus the employment of a pseudonym. In 1913, she completed The Mystic Way. It promised a psychological examination of mysticism by tracing it as a development in the lives of Jesus, Paul, and John. The purpose was to establish a pattern of the mystical approach to life. To end, she promoted the liturgy of the Mass as the witness of mysticism in Christendom. This work displayed Underhill's notion at the time that the real church consisted of the mystical, and not the mere outward acts of the institution. It must be mentioned, that Underhill came to dislike this book for its inaccuracies.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>Armstrong, 201.

<sup>22</sup>Williams, 18-19.

Feeling the necessity to make the concept of mysticism more readily available to "average" people, Underhill published Practical Mysticism in 1914. The outstanding element surrounding this work was that it went to press during the initial outbreaks of the first world war. Underhill considered halting the release of it, but reconsidered, and substantiated her reasons in the Preface. She maintained, "'Practical' Mysticism--means nothing if the attitude and discipline which it recommends be adapted to fair weather alone: if the principles for which it stands break down when subjected to the pressure of event, and cannot be reconciled with the sterner duties of the national life."<sup>23</sup>

Underhill was very active in the war efforts. She used her language skills to translate much needed guide books, and frequently wrote in support of patriotism. Following is a sample taken from some of her articles which were later collected and published as Essentials of Mysticism.

So the Christian thinker may hold that war under certain circumstances is both inevitable and salutary for the race, yet must not on that account excuse the crime of those who deliberately induce it. . . . Yet the beautiful dreams of pacifism will no more eliminate armed conflict from the physical order than the dreams of Christian Science will eliminate sickness.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Practical Mysticism (1914; reprint, Columbus: Ariel Press, 1987), 12.

<sup>24</sup>Evelyn Underhill, "Problems of Conflict," The Hibbert Journal 13 (April 1915): 502.

Thus, her activity during World War I may be detailed as participating in the national interests of the day, coupled with a sensitivity to continue her insistence of mysticism as a viable way of life; even, and especially, in the face of difficult circumstances.

Before leaving consideration of this time in Underhill's life, her dappling as a poet needs brief attention. By this time, she had published two books of poetry, Immanence and Theophanies. Though neither being of much repute, they contain most of Underhill's attempts at constructing meaningful verse.<sup>25</sup> The following is a short piece which appeared in Immanence in 1912.

I come in the little things,  
Saith the Lord:  
Not borne on morning wings  
Of majesty, but I have set My Feet  
Amidst the delicate and bladed wheat  
That springs triumphant in the furrowed sod.  
There do I dwell, in weakness and power;  
Not broken or divided, Saith our God!<sup>26</sup>

Even though this sampling moves this author, Underhill felt her inadequacies as a poet must cause her to relinquish the

---

<sup>25</sup>However, Orlo Strunk Jr. asserts that her poems reveal the early phases of her spiritual quest and the struggles involved. He entertains the thought that, "Perhaps those of us who are spiritual 'kittens' need the insights of Evelyn's religious verses more than anyone else. We need to see clearly the necessity for a genuinely immanent conception of God along with the requirement of knowing man's predicament realistically and in the flesh. These two factors, so prevalent in Evelyn's verses, are starting points." "The Religious Verses of Evelyn Underhill," Wesleyan Studies in Religion 58 (1965-1966): 11.

<sup>26</sup>Douglas Steere, Gleanings: A Random Harvest (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1986), 61.

use of this medium for purposes of self-expression.

Crisis and direction. During the war, Evelyn lost the friendship of her dearest spiritual companion, Ethel Barker. She died after a long battle with illness. It has been presumed that Ms. Barker was the closest friend Evelyn ever had. Underhill experienced great stress in her personal life during the war years and early 1920's. Probably, only Ethel Barker knew of her struggle, and her death left Underhill without much needed companionship. She wrote of her agitation in retrospect, "I went to pieces as I told you: though with several vivid calls back which I did not respond to."<sup>27</sup> For a woman in her mid-forties, she appeared to most, successful in all facets of life. She had become a renown author of several books, a sought-after director, and recently, had been asked to deliver the Upton Lectures in Manchester College in Oxford (the first woman ever to receive this honor). On the inside, however, a battle was raging. Douglas Steere comments, "It was at this critical point of yearning and of a sharp midlife despair that she approached Baron von Hügel in the autumn of 1921 and asked if he would be willing to become her spiritual director."<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, she decided to commit herself to the Anglican Communion. Admittedly, she was not thrilled with the prospect of never enjoying communion in the Roman

---

<sup>27</sup>Cropper, 72.

<sup>28</sup>Steere, 63.

Catholic Church. Nevertheless, this letter to Dom John Chapman explains her resolve.

I . . . solidly believe in the Catholic status of the Anglican Church, as to orders and sacraments, little as I appreciate many of the things done among us . . . The whole point to me is that our Lord has put me ~~here~~, keeps on giving me more and more jobs to do for souls here, and has never given me orders to move . . . I know what the push of God is like, and should obey it if it came--at least I trust and believe so.<sup>29</sup>

This pivotal crisis and ensuing response in Underhill's life became the catalyst which would ultimately change her approach to the spiritual life and tremendously influence her writings, as well as her future work.

It is instantly apparent that the assistance von Hügel afforded Underhill cannot be calculated or even estimated. She admits that next to God, von Hügel advanced her the most in the spiritual life.<sup>30</sup> His efforts with her focused primarily on three issues: the Church, the poor, and the ideological shift from theocentric tendencies to a more thoroughly Christocentric perspective.

If Underhill had any specific leanings (and it seems she did), it was toward the side of individualism. She fought institutionalism much of her early life. It did not take the Baron long, however, to convince her of the

---

<sup>29</sup>Williams, 25.

<sup>30</sup>In her 1931 letter to Dom John Chapman she admits, "Under God, I owe him my whole spiritual life, and there would be much more of it than there is, if I had been more courageous and stern with myself and followed his directions more thoroughly." Williams, 196.

benefits of the Church. He often told her the Church must come before the mystic. By 1923, she was directing others on this important issue. One of her letters details her relatively recent conviction.

I stood out against it [the Church] myself for so long and have been so thoroughly convinced of my own error, that I do not want other people to waste time in the same way. . . . Nothing can save you from narrow intensity and "verticalness" if you reject all the corporate and institutional side--always rather repugnant to people of our temperament.<sup>31</sup>

Evident is her certainty that to avoid unnecessary pitfalls in the spiritual life, one needs to be secured in the fellowship of believers, even though it often is distasteful to those who flourish on immediate experience juxtaposed to organized liturgy and memorized prayers.

The second area von Hügel addressed was Underhill's tendency to intellectualize the spiritual life. He felt she needed to make her attempts more incarnational. She did not need more time spent in prayer or Church or confession, but she did need the discipline of service. Thus, this excerpt is taken from one of his letters and contains his instructions regarding the matter.

You badly want de-intellectualizing, or at least developing homely, human sense and spirit dispositions and activities. Gradually you may be able to draw out, perhaps even to help some of these poor religiously. But the good **you yourself** will gain, long before this, and quite apart from this, will be very great. For it will, if properly entered into and persevered with, dis-

---

<sup>31</sup>Williams, 311-312.

cipline, mortify, soften, deepen and quiet you; it will, as it were, distribute your blood--some of your blood--away from the brain, where too much is lodged at present.<sup>32</sup>

Certainly, the Baron exercised exceptional discernment because Underhill conceded that working with the poor was a most liberating activity which prodigiously increased her compassion and love. During this time, almost without exception, she spent two afternoons each week among the poor in North Kensington. As one from upper-middle class England, this must initially have been a difficult assignment, even though she never carried her wealth pretentiously. Nevertheless, it proved to be a transforming experience for this English mystic.

The third area which the Baron addressed was Underhill's necessity of becoming more thoroughly Christocentric. As she shared with her pupils, she came to Christ through God, not the other way around. Her new orientation cannot be adequately explained by a commentator, but rather her own words must speak of this perspective which came to be more dominant. The following quotation was presumably written in 1927.

I was a convinced theocentric, thought most Christocentric language and practice sentimental and superstitious and was very handy to shallow psychological explanations of it. I had, from time to time, what seemed to be vivid experiences of God, from the time of my conversion from agnosticism (about twenty years ago now). This position I thought to be that of a broadminded

---

<sup>32</sup>Cropper, 75.

and intelligent Christian, but when . . . I went to the Baron [this refers to the 1921 directorate] he said I wasn't much better than a Unitarian! Somehow by his prayers for something he compelled me to experience Christ. He never said anything more about it--but I know humanly speaking he did it. It took about four months--it was like watching the sun rise very slowly--and then suddenly one knew what it was.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, the centrality of the church, the service to the poor, and christocentric devotion provided the necessary framework to support and enrich Evelyn Underhill's next movements in ministry. Furthermore, these developments proved pivotal for Underhill. She no longer remained solely devoted to delving deeper into the subject of mysticism. She became enthralled with the challenge of the spiritual life within the confines of orthodox Christianity, with the benefits of mystical experience. It was for her a fundamental shift in viewpoint. The impact of the Baron's direction would continue to influence Underhill long after his death in 1925.

It is this event in her life that marks for any analyzer of Underhill's life, preeminent information. Her writings to this point include the dominant theme of mysticism; and in the early writings, even little differentiation between Christian and non-Christian forms. Moreover, their contents reveal no authorial preference for mysticism within or without the confines of community. However, the works she produced after receiving direction

---

<sup>33</sup>Williams, 26.



from the Baron, reveal a markedly different perspective. It is these, produced in her mature years, that offer the student of mysticism and the spiritual life, the most beneficial nuggets of truth, for they reveal insights of one's discoveries following a life of diligent seeking. Therefore, more thorough attention will be given to these later years in Chapter 3 with consideration given to the development of her thought.

Retreats. While she was still under von Hügel's direction (1924), Underhill was asked to conduct a retreat at Pleshey, an Anglican retreat house. As will become evident, Pleshey was a special environment for this Anglican author. Generally, she gave three retreats there per year, as well as several others at different locations. Her retreats at Pleshey included one in Lent, one the Sunday after Ascension, and one for All Saints. Since this was a new agenda for a woman in England in the early 1900's, Underhill understood the invitation as the movement of God signaling the work He had designed specifically for her. Therefore, she brought all the tools and gifts which she possessed to this task. It is noted that she diligently prepared for these retreats and left no detail without serious consideration--including hymn selection to altar preparation, to room assignments. Moreover, she prepared by spending hours in the Pleshey chapel in prayer. Underhill was meticulous; therefore, her retreats reflected her

careful preparation, and the results confirmed her genius as a retreat leader. A common theme runs through the responses of those who were lead by Evelyn. To the retreatants, she revealed the tangible presence of God. Referring to Underhill's retreat work, Cropper intimates, "She slipped quietly into what was certainly her most distinctive work. . . . no one can have brought this particular work for God to greater perfection."<sup>34</sup>

Conducting retreats also increased Underhill's correspondence as a spiritual director. Several retreatants would contact her following the retreats and ask for guidance. Being a gracious woman, sensitive to the spiritual lives of all, she courteously responded to each request. She did not allow her busy schedule to interfere with the spiritual progress of others. It must be acknowledged that she never felt comfortable leading souls in this way, for she felt she was not prepared to help others. She even referred to herself as a poor physician of souls forgetting important elements of the prescription until after the patient had left.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, she responded where she was asked; presumably with the reminder of how much she had gained from the Baron in the recesses of her mind.

Evelyn Underhill was a person who enjoyed close

---

<sup>34</sup>Cropper, 119.

<sup>35</sup>Williams, 227.

friendships. Lucy Menzies became her closest after Ethel Barker died. Lucy was introduced to Underhill by her publisher, J. M. Dent during the first World War. However, it was later that they became close friends. The last section of letters in The Letters of Evelyn Underhill features the depth of their lasting friendship, and provides a glimpse of Underhill as Lucy's spiritual guide. Lucy had become the Warden at Pleshey in 1933, and thus her position afforded her numerous opportunities to develop a lasting friendship with Underhill, as well as experience retreats under her direction.

Publications. Now, attention must be given to Underhill's published works in order to deduce the flavor of her writing after receiving instruction from von Hügel. The first consideration will be given to Essentials of Mysticism which is a compilation of several addresses composed from 1912-1920; though Underhill readily admits to rewriting and editing them before sending them to press in this form.

The general formula for this book is that the first addresses focus on the concept of mysticism, and the last addresses explore the lives of mystics. One easily notices the stark comparison between this work and the earlier Mysticism. However, they should not be construed as synonymous. Important developments from the searching Underhill to the mature Underhill can be illumined from careful examination.

In the first volume, a mystical approach to life did not necessarily stem from a Christian viewpoint. The best mystics from all religions were considered equal. The latter volume, denotes traces of this perspective as well. Underhill still considered the best of every mystic to be quite similar regardless of their point of origin. Furthermore, she still was intent on using psychology as the primary tool in which to determine the development of the mystic. The typical three stages of the mystic are still recognized as legitimate vehicles to relate the growth of mystical consciousness.

Where, then, does the developing Underhill display her changing attitude toward mysticism? She includes an essay which relates, rather definitively, the absolute necessity of the mystic to be tied to community; insisting that both the mystic and the community need each other. The institution keeps the mystic disciplined in a favorable environment for such searching of truth, thus fostering a much needed balance for the mystic. And the mystic, in turn, contributes to the church by sharing of revelatory truth and offerings of service. Underhill uses the metaphor of a tentacle to describe this two-fold experience of the mystic. The tentacle [the mystic] reaches out past the world of finite, into the mystery of the Infinite. This aspect, however, only constitutes half of the mystic's activity. The other portion is to relate as well as

possible to the community, the insight gathered from the mystical experience with Infinity. Therefore, the function of the mystic is to receive in order to give; not to hoard the mystical perception for oneself. It is helpful to recognize this progression in Underhill's thought; for it demonstrates her movement from individualistic mysticism to communal mysticism, in which the mystic must be involved in community to be genuine. Furthermore, she is well on the way to being completely convinced of the necessity of the mystic to be grounded in the Christian faith. Essentials of Mysticism provides a keyhole in which to begin witnessing this pertinent shift of the English mystic.

The series of lectures which Underhill delivered at Manchester College in 1921 have been published as Life of the Spirit and the Life of To-day. These also reflect her growing concern that personal religion must result in corporate expression. In these addresses, one can decipher the new focus of her message revealing the influence of the Baron. Fay Campbell explains this transitional shift, "Previously intent on the individual mystical experience of God, she now was convinced of the corporate nature of Christianity and the necessity of institutional affiliation."<sup>36</sup> Underhill poses that even though institutional religion often seems to stifle the person more sensitive to personal experience, it, nonetheless is helpful

---

<sup>36</sup>Campbell, 12.

in maintaining a protective environment against possible extremes.

The Baron witnessed the developing change in Underhill of the 1911 Mysticism, and the Underhill of later works. He remarks in a revised bibliography present in his 1923 edition of the Mystical Element of Religion, "Interesting progress from Mysticism, 1911, full of breadth and charm, but lacking the institutional sense, after several excessively mystical works, to The Life of the Spirit, 1922, bravely insistent upon history and institutionalism, and furnishing a solidly valuable collection of papers."<sup>37</sup>

During her time as a pupil of von Hügel, Evelyn Underhill joined the Conference on Politics, Economics and Christianity (COPEC). This group was an organization of concerned ecumenical Christians seeking to explore and contribute to the social and economic difficulties of England. Underhill not only participated in this organization, she offered addresses gravid with assertions that Christians cannot be withdrawn from society; but, on the contrary, must be actively working within it, motivated by the love of Christ. A lecture she delivered to the conference entitled "Christian Basis of Social Action" details her position of the Christian's personal life and

---

<sup>37</sup>Baron Friedrich von Hügel, The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa, and Her Friends, 2 vols. (1908; reprint, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1925), 1: xiv.

social action. She stated, ". . . when it [God] becomes to us a living, all-penetrating reality and not a theological statement, [it] is found to require from us a life which spends itself in love and service on this world . . . A life, in fact, moving towards a goal where work and prayer become one thing."<sup>38</sup> It is precisely this tension of transcendence and immanence which Underhill gleaned from her director and voraciously espoused throughout the remainder of her life that is easily detected in these, her latter works. Even though, she worked at increasing England's level of social awareness, she did not publicly reveal her political views. She was concerned about the possibilities of alienating herself with those who might draw spiritual help from her. Therefore, she urged the Christians to become involved in their society, but she did not expose her political alliances.

Mystics of the Church released in 1925 serves as an additional witness to the new vision of Underhill. As the title suggests, this piece is committed to exploring the mystic within the context of the church. Written with a concern for undue attention to isolated and ecstatic mystics juxtaposed to mystics within the traditional, institutional church; Underhill sought to provide a provocative glimpse of these often forgotten mystics, who she claimed, have

---

<sup>38</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Mixed Pasture: Twelve Essays and Addresses (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), 110-111.

inspired the church from its very inception. Instead of promoting mysticism as an independent activity focused on the world beyond the physical, Underhill now saw mysticism in conjunction with the spiritual life, being, in fact, its very soul.<sup>39</sup> Dana Greene acknowledges this change in perception evident in Underhill's publications of 1925 and following. She claims, "Mysticism might remain a wholly spiritual activity for Underhill, but it was an activity that must be carried out in and through the world of Becoming."<sup>40</sup> Certainly, then, Mystics of the Church provide the student of Underhill with confirmation of the extraordinary influence the Baron had on the developing Anglican; who after this experience with her director, would have untold effect on her generation and those to follow. This book also marks a change in her language. In it she still uses the terms mysticism and mystics, though in a different context than before. And, after this work, she writes mainly of the spiritual life and saints, a notable shift.

1925 was not only a pivotal year of publication for Underhill, but also one of grief. In April of the previous year, her mother died after a short illness, and in January 1925, Friedrich von Hügel died. Her mother's death was

---

<sup>39</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Mystics of the Church (1925; reprint, Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1975), 10.

<sup>40</sup>Greene, "The Thought of Evelyn Underhill," 556.



certainly difficult due to the lack of interest in religion Mrs. Underhill displayed while alive. Furthermore, it precipitated a possible move for Hubert and Evelyn in order for Evelyn to care more closely for her father. However, that possibility was never realized. Evelyn Underhill was to have sent her annual report to the Baron in June of that year. So, hearing of his poor health, she sent him one last letter in which she indicated her unimproved spiritual state. von Hügel characteristically replied that she should gently turn these impressions over to God and try to release her continual drive of reckless self-examination.<sup>41</sup>

Underhill felt she should write something of his help to her after he died; so, in an article now reprinted in Mixed Pasture she testified, "'Full of the breadth, the depth, and the tenderness of the Saints.' Those who owe him most, will see in this phrase his fitting epitaph."<sup>42</sup>

#### The Mature Years: 1926-1941

Publications. In 1929 Evelyn Underhill was appointed the religious editor of The Spectator. Writing to Lucy Menzies regarding this new undertaking, she quipped,

You'll be amused to hear that I have been appointed Religious Editor of the Spectator, and all that side of the paper is now to be in my hands. I trust it won't mean an awful lot of work, it is rather an opportunity to get the

---

<sup>41</sup>For a reprint of her letter and the Baron's response consult Armstrong, 234-235.

<sup>42</sup>Underhill, Mixed Pasture, 233.

things one wishes said before the public.<sup>43</sup>

Margaret Cropper mentions that Underhill enjoyed this position for three years. After a change in management, she resigned and worked for Time and Tide. As with her previous appointment, she delighted in this work as well.

Mysticism underwent its twelfth printing in 1930.

Underhill composed a preface to this edition in which she delineates discoveries she had made with regard to mysticism. She claimed that if she were to write the book again, she would emphasize three aspects. First, an emphasis on Reality juxtaposed to the mystic would be made. Secondly, she would stress the paradox of God and soul, which enables the development of the mystic. Thirdly, she would accentuate the predominant action of the Supernatural over against the evolution of spiritual transcendence. Moreover, instead of using vitalism (an ideology which espouses that no life force exists outside of nature) as the philosophic background for examining the experience of the mystics, she would use critical realism (recognition of Reality's simultaneous transcendence and immanence), a concept she had gleaned from von Hügel.<sup>44</sup> Again, these notes contribute to the pool of evidence that Underhill's thought had undergone considerable change under the direction of the Baron.

---

<sup>43</sup>Cropper, 152.

<sup>44</sup>Underhill, Mysticism, xiv.

Mixed Pasture is a collection of addresses and essays which Underhill published in 1933. However, some papers written between 1922 and 1937 were not included in this printing because they were available in various pamphlets. Therefore, they are now compiled in what was first entitled Collected Papers, and now is available under the appellation Life as Prayer. The scope of this study does not allow detailed consideration of each work. However, some brief comments regarding the pieces as a whole must be made.

The first piece, Mixed Pasture, takes its title from a quotation by von Hügel printed in the beginning of the book. The Baron declared, "I so love to watch cows as they browse at the borders, up against the hedges of fields. They move along, with their great tongues drawing in just only what they can assimilate; yes--but without stopping to snort defiantly against what does not thus suite them . . . So ought we to do."<sup>45</sup> The first three essays consider three approaches of general Christian principles including "The Philosophy of Contemplation," "A Study of Sanctity," and "Spiritual Life." The second division of addresses delineates the social implications of Christianity. Finally, the closing section deals with varying expressions of the spiritual life based on different personalities.

The papers in Life as Prayer also consider different themes. Four center on prayer. One takes up the subject of

---

<sup>45</sup>Underhill, Mixed Pasture, xii.

worship. "The Inside of Life" is an exposition on the failure of Modernism to reach beyond the outer, surface life, producing a neglect of the science of the inner life. Also included in this volume is an essay on mysticism which will be considered in Chapter 4. Finally, three collections deal with the vocation and spirituality of the educator.

The maturing Underhill reveals her growth by discussing these varying topics with a thoroughly Christian perspective. She also divulges that mysticism is no longer her central concern, but, rather, it is developed within the context of the spiritual life. Furthermore, mysticism is now a balanced way of integrating the inner and outer lives into one. The spiritual life is a life punctuated with mysticism, but not as an isolated concept, but a way of living incarnationally. And this incarnational mysticism is the essence of the seasoned Underhill.

Due to the limitations of this thesis, consideration to the retreat addresses must be accomplished as a corpus rather than individual attention given to each publication. Therefore, examination and comments will be given as they relate to the whole. The retreats usually focused around a provocative metaphor which Underhill deemed especially elucidating, or they were developed from a well-known prayer or piece of literature. Generally, Evelyn Underhill used the same material for each retreat given during the course of one year. Then, during the following years, the

collection of addresses were published in book form.

Following is a brief description of these retreat books.

Concerning the Inner Life is a compilation of three addresses given to the clergy in 1926, and published in the same year. Underhill was the first lay woman in the Church of England to accomplish such a feat. As Cropper surmised, Evelyn was the only woman in her day whom the clergy were ready to hear.<sup>46</sup>

The House of the Soul, printed in 1929 is a collection of retreat addresses centered on a simple, yet provocative metaphor, quite characteristic of Underhill's work. The house of the soul contains two floors according to this retreat leader. The lower floor consists of the natural life, the biological arena which humans walk while on this earth. The upper level, is a supernatural life pregnant with grand possibilities of God. While fleeting human existence is an earthy trial, it is not without the presence of the Eternal.

The year 1932 saw the printing of Underhill's favorite piece, The Golden Sequence. This work was birthed in part from retreat addresses given in 1930 to the Wives' Fellowship and the Anglican Fellowship. It was based on a well-known hymn from the Middle Ages, Veni Sancte Spiritus. The book focuses on the relation of the created spirit with the "Spirit Increate."

---

<sup>46</sup>Cropper, 199.

The Mount of Purification contains the retreat addresses from 1931. These were based on "Dante's image of purification as a process of climbing the terraces of a mountain."<sup>47</sup>

The retreat messages of 1932 were gathered into the volume, The Light of Christ. As Armstrong succinctly shares, this book portrays "the complex of the 'mysteries' of Christ's life--birth and childhood, Christ as healer, Christ as rescuer, Christ crucified and glorified, are linked as seven richly coloured windows of a cathedral through which streams God's own light."<sup>48</sup>

A treatment of the Nicene Creed is found in The School of Charity, six addresses given in 1933. The purpose of this undertaking was to demonstrate the connection between theology and the inner life which is often supposed as merely a "spiritual alternative to orthodoxy."<sup>49</sup>

The Mystery of Sacrifice is the compilation of addresses from Evelyn Underhill's only retreat in 1935. It is a reflection of her study on the Eucharist gathered from research for her book on worship. In it, she suggests that a rhythm is involved in the Eucharist, and this rhythm consists of Offertory, Intercession, Consecration, and

---

<sup>47</sup>Campbell, 13.

<sup>48</sup>Armstrong, 267.

<sup>49</sup>Evelyn Underhill, The School of Charity: Meditations on the Christian Creed (1934; reprint, Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), xiii.

Communion.

Considered as her finest retreat publication, Abba, was published in the summer of 1940, based on addresses given in 1935. It is a consideration on the Lord's Prayer. Margaret Cropper exclaims that it sold 1,500 copies in the first two weeks, and 5,000 before Easter of that same year!<sup>50</sup>

The Fruits of the Spirit contains two sections: the first is a gathering of retreat messages given at Pleshey in 1936. The second section is a compilation of letters from Underhill to her prayer group. This prayer group became to Underhill a great source of strength during her periods of ill health. It consisted of women who wished to combine theology and prayer. During the war, they became scattered over England, and it was Underhill's letters which kept them united.

Grace Adolphsen Brame asks the pertinent question about Evelyn Underhill's retreats. She poses, "Was there any significant difference between this Underhill and the one who wrote Mysticism (published in 1911) and four other major books on the same subject in the fourteen years up through 1925? Her answer: "There is no doubt of the change that came about in Underhill from the time when she began writing Mysticism in 1907 until the completion of her first retreat in 1924."<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup>Cropper, 224-225.

<sup>51</sup>Brame, 14.

The first striking note about these retreat addresses is the personal character they reflect. The author is sharing not some theory gleaned from a critical student of the spiritual life, but rather experiential truths found within her own heart. As Lucy Menzies shares regarding Light of Christ [and, this author submits, presumably all of her retreats], "She was showing them [retreatants] a path along which she herself was travelling, and all the discoveries as to the best way she put generously at their disposal."<sup>52</sup> Secondly, they reveal a confidence in the truth of Christ that was "hidden" in her earlier works. By the time she was conducting retreats, she was secured in her relationship with God and within Church. The questing years had brought her to the place of assurance. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly for the focus of this thesis, Underhill shifted from focusing on mysticism to focusing on the spiritual life. These retreat addresses add to the pool of information which reveals this movement.

Brief consideration needs to be given to The Spiritual Life, which is a compilation of broadcast talks Underhill gave in 1936. While the book does not contain any new thesis apart from her other mature works, it does quite beautifully portray the manner in which Evelyn could relate the spiritual life to ordinary listeners. It is perhaps the

---

<sup>52</sup>Lucy Menzies, "Memoir" in Light of Christ by Evelyn Underhill (1945; reprint, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., Inc., 1946), 10.



best example of the eloquence and ease in which Underhill, the self-accomplished scholar, could become Underhill the "spiritual director to her generation."<sup>53</sup>

While Mysticism is considered Underhill's first major masterpiece, Worship (1936) is considered her last. It is noted that this comprehensive volume probably contributed to her failing health. Nonetheless, she undertook this project with all the vigor and intensity which so consistently portrays her. Her objective with this piece was to "explore those primary realities of man's relations to God which our devotional action is intended to express."<sup>54</sup> The first division of the book addresses characteristics of Christian worship including chapters on ritual and symbol, sacrament and sacrifice, principles of corporate worship, and liturgical elements. The second division seeks to illustrate these characteristics in various environments including an examination of Jewish, Catholic, Reformed, Free, and Anglican worship traditions. Indicative of the mature Underhill, this work is incarnational whereas Mysticism was other-worldly; and, it is strongly institutional versus the individualistic tendencies of the earlier volume. Mysticism was no longer an isolated concept

---

<sup>53</sup>J. Henry Bodgener, "Evelyn Underhill: Spiritual Director to her Generation," London Quarterly and Holborn Review 183 (Jan. 1958): 46.

<sup>54</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Worship (1936; reprint, New York: Harper & Brothers, Harper Torchbook, 1957), vii.

to be acknowledged or practiced inside or outside the Church, but an integral part of the spiritual life of one completely connected to the Church. Underhill displays in this work, her culmination of developing thought. It is apparent that none of her pieces should be examined apart from her entire corpus. Rather, as Dana Greene asserts, her writing should be seen as a continuum displaying her movement from mysticism to the spiritual life.<sup>55</sup>

Final years. By 1936, Evelyn Underhill was experiencing ill health, which would ultimately take her life at a relatively early age. She had bouts with asthma most of her life, and with increasing age came increasing bouts with greater intensity, often precipitating further related complications. However, even these trials did not produce anxiety or bitterness in this Anglican saint. In a letter to her dear friend, Lucy Menzies, she shared her thoughts regarding their ill health.

You and I have both been allowed a good run of active work, but the real test is giving it up, and passively accepting God's action, and work, and the suffering that usually goes with it . . . After all, our Lord Himself had to leave His work to twelve quite inferior disciples. We have to learn to accept for ourselves all that that means, before we are really abandoned to God.<sup>56</sup>

Underhill was quite wonderfully surprised in 1938 when Aberdeen University made her a Doctor of Divinity. Failing

---

<sup>55</sup>Greene, "The Thought of Evelyn Underhill," 550.

<sup>56</sup>Cropper, 204.

health kept her from attending the ceremony, even when the school postponed it for a year, hoping to find her able. Nonetheless, it was a most fitting honor, and underneath her humility, she must have been thrilled. This author wishes to note, however, that excitement over being given this honor should not be confused with any presupposed desire Evelyn Underhill might have had concerning women's rights. Underhill was not an advocate of this movement per se. In fact, she challenged women with the following excerpt from an essay which was reprinted in Mixed Pasture. She stated,

If a new era in women's life in the Church really is opening, do not let us come to it inwardly unprepared, because we are in such a hurry to begin. For improvement in our position, or mere multiplication of women serving in the Church will do nothing to extend the Kingdom unless those who enter on this career are really light-bringing souls.<sup>57</sup>

Two years before her death, World War II commenced. One will remember Underhill's adamant position supporting the national efforts during the first war. However, this was not her conviction by the time of the second war. Through her maturing years, she became an avowed pacifist. Following are some selections taken to highlight her view. The first is from a paper she submitted to the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship to which she belonged. "If she remains true to her supernatural call, the Church cannot acquiesce in War--for War, however camouflaged or excused, must always

---

<sup>57</sup>Cropper, 173.

mean the effort of a group of men to achieve their purpose . . . by inflicting destruction and death on another group of men."<sup>58</sup> Secondly, she wrote the following to E.I. Watkin on January 1, 1941. "I cannot feel, however, that committing sin to cure sin is either Christianity or common sense, and the steady increase in bombast and self-righteous heroics is very displeasing, isn't it? Perhaps we have reached a level of collective sinfulness in which we cannot do right."<sup>59</sup> Thirdly, she divulged to Mildred Bosanquet on May 12, 1941, " . . . there are only two ways of meeting him [Hitler]--war, or the Cross. And only a very small number are ready for the Cross . . ."<sup>60</sup>

Though she felt very passionately about war and England's involvement in it, she did not despair. She revealed her confidence that God was in control and doing a work in the midst of war. To L.K. on June 20, 1940, she wrote, "I feel more and more it is all a great purging action of God, beyond our control, and using the Nazis as His instruments."<sup>61</sup> And to Nesta De Robeck on October 23, 1940 she contended,

Underneath all this muddle and horror, however,  
I do have don't you? a queer underground feeling  
that something new is being prepared? a more

---

<sup>58</sup>Cropper, 214.

<sup>59</sup>Williams, 300.

<sup>60</sup>Williams, 308.

<sup>61</sup>Williams, 291.

realistic view of religion, a fresh sense of the overwhelming majesty of God, a shifting of emphasis to a more organic Christianity--not just socially but **supernaturally** organic.<sup>62</sup>

By 1939, Underhill was experiencing more sickness, and Hubert was having his own difficulties with illness as well. Since they fared better in the country, they went with another couple, the Vernons, to Highden for a period of time. They planned to return to their beloved home; though due to worsened health and the outbreak of World War II this never transpired. Instead the families remained in the country through the winter, and Evelyn did not return to London until Easter of the following year. It was with Mrs. Vernon at her side that Evelyn Underhill lived out the remainder of her life amid the bombs and anti-aircraft guns of the war. She never returned to her home with her books and other beloved treasures. Though her energy was quite limited, she still found it possible to write letters of direction and various articles or pieces for numerous projects.

After increasing weakness, she died June 15, 1941. Margaret Cropper comments about her ensuing death, "Her last years had taught her to relinquish one thing after another, it was the Abandonment to the Will of God which one of her favourite writers, de Caussade, had taught her, the

---

<sup>62</sup>Williams, 295.

'stripping' which she knew how to accept."<sup>63</sup> Certainly, The Christian Century's death notice was correct when it admitted that many owed a debt of longstanding to this marvelous saint. She will not only be remembered and revered, but will continue to teach and lead many in the ways of God.

Olive Wyon records the following prayer given at Pleshey after Underhill died. It reveals, as no other attempt with words can, the profound reverence in which she was held by those who knew her most.

O God, who by the lives of those who love  
 Thee dost refashion the souls of men,  
 We give thanks for the ministry of Thy  
     servant Evelyn:  
 In whose life and words Thy love and  
     majesty were made known to us,  
 Whose loving spirit set our spirits on fire,  
 Who learnt from Thee the Shepherd's care  
     for his sheep:  
 Grant that some measure of the Spirit  
 Which she received from Thee may fall on  
     us who love her.  
 We ask it for the sake of Jesus Christ our  
     Lord. Amen.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup>Cropper, 232.

<sup>64</sup>Olive Wyon, Teaching Toward Christian Perfection: Introducing Three Spiritual Classics (United States of America: Woman's Division of Christian Service Board of Missions, The Methodist Church, 1963), 154.

## CHAPTER 3

## Mysticism

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the concept of mysticism as Evelyn Underhill came to understand and espouse it in her mature years (1926-1941). The author has chosen to focus on this later period in Underhill's life. For, contrary to Regina Bechtle's<sup>1</sup> opinion, Underhill's conception of mysticism underwent considerable change from her first major work in 1911 (Mysticism) to her last major one in 1936 (Worship). The rationale for this examination is that it will provide a framework in which to draw some conclusions regarding the viability of the term for use today. In other words, drawing on mysticism as Underhill did, will enable the author to dispel frequent criticisms of mysticism and also to suggest some positive contributions it can afford in contemporary Christian circles.

Historical Background

The pervasive milieu in which Underhill constructed her ideas of mysticism consisted of a new age of theological reflection. The Enlightenment of the previous century had

---

<sup>1</sup>Regina Marie Bechtle, "The Mystic and the Church in the Writings of Evelyn Underhill" (Ph.D. Diss., Fordham Univer., 1979): 55, 70. Bechtle claims that due to similar definitions of mysticism contained in Mysticism and a 1936 article entitled "What is Mysticism", that her understanding did not substantially change. Though it can be verified on these grounds that her views did not suffer radical transformation, she did, however, exhibit evidence of perceiving mysticism from a different perspective. This chapter will trace this evolutionary movement, which began with emphasis on mysticism and ended with an emphasis on worship.

not only left its mark on society as a whole; it had radically altered the manner in which religious apologetics needed to be conducted. In addition, the 1800's witnessed the publication of Darwin's theory of evolution revealed in On the Origin of Species (1859) and The Descent of Man (1871). The optimism of science had replaced personal faith in God. No longer did the Bible offer authoritative guidelines on the character of God, creation, the world, or morality. Science and rational conclusions promised the answers to life's puzzling questions.

This atmosphere created the need for Christian apologetics to change fundamentally in its approach to theological inquiry. The Enlightenment was the catalyst which shifted the theological balance describing God's action in the world from transcendence to immanence. What resulted was the rise of liberal theology, which ultimately failed to provide what it promised: innovative orthodox thinking which built on the current developments uncovered by the "age of reason." Authors Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson provide five common features of the liberal theology which influenced society around the turn of the 20th century (when Underhill began her writing career).

They are:

1. Reconstructing Christian beliefs in light of modern knowledge.
2. Emphasis on freedom of the Christian to criticize and reconstruct traditional beliefs.
3. Focus on practical or ethical dimensions of Christianity.



4. Base theology on something other than the Bible.
5. Emphasis on the immanence of God at the expense of transcendence.<sup>2</sup>

It is not only important to recall these characteristics as a backdrop for exploration into Underhill's thought, it is pertinent to recognize the shift of the entire climate as Underhill changed; for the two are not unrelated. At the turn of the century, liberal theology was the dominating current in theological reflection. However, by the time Underhill was being influenced by Baron von Hügel, the balance was shifting back to an emphasis on God as transcendent. Neo-orthodoxy was revolting against the previous immanence supporters. As Regina Bechtle quoted Horton Davies in her dissertation, Underhill "expressed in her own pilgrimage the religious movement of the whole period as it proceeded from immanentalism to transcendent-alism, from Liberal Protestantism to Orthodoxy, from private mysticism to the institutional expression of allegiance, and from Theocentric to Christocentric faith."<sup>3</sup>

Evelyn Underhill was not the first in England to write on mysticism. C.P.M. Jones writes, in a chapter entitled "Mysticism, Human and Divine" in The Study of Spirituality, "the resurgence of a serious interest in mysticism in the

---

<sup>2</sup>Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, 20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 52.

<sup>3</sup>Bechtle, 17.

Anglo-Saxon world at the turn of the century received considerable impetus from the publication of the books of William James, W.R. Inge and Friedrich von Hügel, and later from the more popular works of Evelyn Underhill."<sup>4</sup>

Parameters of this thesis do not allow for a consideration given to these forerunners of Underhill. However, it can be noted that James' approach to mysticism was empirical.

Inge, on the other hand, presented mysticism in a historical study rooted in the New Testament. And, von Hügel sought investigation of mysticism through the life of St. Catherine of Genoa. Furthermore, it was the Baron's conclusion, that mysticism is a vital element present in all true religion.<sup>5</sup>

#### Underhill: Authority on Mysticism

What qualifies Evelyn Underhill to be an authority on mysticism? First, and foremost is her life as a genuine mystic. She was able to write accurately and passionately on mysticism precisely because the experience resonated within her own soul. Often, abstract theorizing of mysticism reveals an author's own lack of firsthand knowledge; and, as such, is of little use for anything other than speculative philosophy. Underhill, however, displays her fortitude on the subject by her personal, existential

---

<sup>4</sup>C.P.M. Jones, "Mysticism, Human and Divine," in The Study of Spirituality, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 18.

<sup>5</sup>William Ralf Inge, Christian Mysticism (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), 5.

exploration of it. Secondly, Underhill brought an intense, unrelenting scholarship to the subject. Her work reveals immeasurable hours spent on research and examination. Her thorough knowledge of the subject would be hard to surpass, even for the most ambitious scholar. Thirdly, Underhill qualifies as an authority of mysticism because of her authenticity. She did not pretend to be something she was not. Nor, did she seek to hide, unfortunate imbalances of the mystics for sake of reducing resistance to it.

Evelyn Underhill was an expert on the subject, and deserves thorough consideration whenever the term mysticism is being pondered. Thomas Kepler suggests that "no woman in Christian history has written more on the meaning and value of Christian mysticism; and few have been able to interpret the meaning of mysticism in terms of practical, everyday living in a deeper fashion."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Bishop of St. Andrews, in his introduction, concurs that, "Because of her temperament and her acquired attainments she was uniquely qualified to render this inestimable service [study on mysticism] to her fellows. She herself was a mystic and not a mere 'mystical philosopher.'"<sup>7</sup>

In the England of the early 1900's mysticism was a

---

<sup>6</sup>Thomas S. Kepler, comp. The Evelyn Underhill Reader (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 7.

<sup>7</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1946), reprinted as Life as Prayer and Other Writings of Evelyn Underhill, ed. Lucy Menzies (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), 9.

vague concept with no absolute meaning. In fact, Underhill quite readily admits that "they [mystic, mysticism] are generally so vaguely and loosely used that they convey no precise meaning to our minds, and have now come to be perhaps the most ambiguous terms in the whole vocabulary of religion."<sup>8</sup> It was within this atmosphere that Underhill sought to redeem this concept for society, and then specifically, for the church. As will become evident, her work achieved this goal, and popularized this notion as no one has since.

As stated in Chapter 1, the brief definition of mysticism Underhill frequently quoted was "the art of union with God."<sup>9</sup> A more thorough explication needs to be considered for the purpose now at hand. Therefore, first, an examination will be given to mysticism as she defined it during her early years, giving particular emphasis to Mysticism. This will provide the necessary foundation for discussing her concept as she matured. With an accurate understanding of the balanced mysticism which Underhill came to espouse in her mature years; it is this author's ambition to suggest some basic characteristics of mysticism which will open discussion on viable means of employing the term in defense against inaccurate presuppositions and charges.

---

<sup>8</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Mystics of the Church (1925; reprint, Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1975), 9.

<sup>9</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Practical Mysticism (1914; reprint, Columbus: Ariel Press, 1987), 23.

### Mysticism in the Early Years

An initial definition of mysticism follows from her renowned work, Mysticism:

Mysticism, then, is not an opinion: it is not a philosophy. It has nothing in common with the pursuit of occult knowledge. On the one hand it is not merely the power of contemplating Eternity: on the other, it is not to be identified with any kind of religious queerness. It is the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the Love of God: the achievement here and now of the immortal heritage of man. Or, if you like it better --for this means exactly the same thing--it is the art of establishing his conscious relation with the Absolute.

The movement of the mystic consciousness towards this consummation, is not merely the sudden admission to an overwhelming vision of the Truth: though such dazzling glimpses may from time to time be vouchsafed to the soul. It is rather an ordered movement towards ever higher levels of reality, ever closer identification with the Infinite.<sup>10</sup>

Especially important to notice is that Underhill viewed mysticism as a process, an organic movement of the soul, juxtaposed to a philosophical system. Furthermore, the mystic is motivated by love of God, and not some desire for ecstatic or metaphysical experience. However, at the same time, Underhill conceded, such experiences may occur, though they are not the end sought. Evelyn Underhill also notes the movement of the soul. This suggests that the mystic must pass through culminating stages to arrive at the final

---

<sup>10</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness 12th ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 81-82.

destination, i.e. union with God.

William James listed four marks for the mystic state as Ineffability, Noetic Quality, Transiency, and Passivity. However, Underhill proposed four alternatives to this system. She claimed that true mysticism, and thus true mystics, are: Practical and Active, Transcendental and Spiritual, Motivated by Love, and they require Psychological and Spiritual Progress.

In explaining the first characteristic Underhill states, "Over and over again the great mystics tell us, not how they speculated, but how they acted. To them, the transition from the life of sense to the life of spirit is a formidable undertaking, which demands effort and constancy. The paradoxical 'quiet' of the contemplative is but the outward stillness essential to inward work."<sup>11</sup> Thus, to be a true mystic, one must not reject the world in which one lives, but one's experiences become touched with a realization of the Eternal.

The second characteristic Underhill proposed is that mysticism is an entirely spiritual activity. By this, she means that the mystic is not motivated by selfish endeavors to gain "advantages" in life such as power or influence. The mystic is never interested in such debasing desires. To illustrate, Underhill records St. Catherine of Genoa as saying, "I wish not . . . for anything that comes forth from

---

<sup>11</sup>Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism, 83.

Thee, but only for Thee, oh sweetest Love!"<sup>12</sup>

The method of mysticism as love comprises the third characteristic for Evelyn Underhill. She reveals that this is often the most distinctive note of mysticism. This mystic love, which drives all of the person's activities, is "a total dedication of the will; the deep-seated desire and tendency of the soul towards its Source."<sup>13</sup>

The last characteristic of the true mystic involves a definitive psychological process. Her words best describe this idea:

That is to say, it [mysticism] shows itself not merely as an attitude of mind and heart, but as a form of organic life. It is not only a theory of the intellect or a hunger, however passionate, of the heart. It involves the organizing of the whole self, conscious and unconscious, under the spur of such a thunder: a remaking of the whole character on high levels in the interests of the transcendental life. The mystics are emphatic in their statement that spiritual desires are useless unless they initiate this costly movement of the whole self towards the Real.<sup>14</sup>

These four characteristics (practical, transcendental, love motivated, and psychological progress) shed light on the unique approach to mysticism which Underhill espoused. (These marks will be especially illuminating as common criticisms are leveled against mysticism in Chapter 4.)

Also noteworthy is Evelyn Underhill's employment of

---

<sup>12</sup>Underhill, Mysticism, 85.

<sup>13</sup>Underhill, Mysticism, 85.

<sup>14</sup>Underhill, Mysticism, 90.

psychology to illumine her concept of mysticism and the mystic. She was deeply affected by the new developments in psychology present in the England of her day. Her emphasis on the psychological development of the mystic reveals her intrigue with "modern" science. As Dana Greene points out, for Underhill "Psychology acknowledges the range of psychic life below the conscious level, the unity of the psyche and the importance and primacy of feeling in all that has to do with the transcendent."<sup>15</sup> Thus, her first volume, Mysticism, contributes more than half of its pages to the progression of the mystic, entitled, "The Mystic Way" which draws heavily from the science of psychology. Contrary to the classical three stages of development, Underhill suggests five stages. A cursory glance at this will prove fruitful for further exploration into Underhill's early concept of mysticism.

The first classification of mystical development is the awakening of the self. According to Underhill, this experience is usually abrupt and well-marked. Intense joy and exaltation are frequently encountered. Furthermore, the English mystic differentiates between this stage and "conversion" as normally termed by Christians to describe that event in which one accepts the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. She claims,

---

<sup>15</sup>Dana Greene, "Toward an Evaluation of the Thought of Evelyn Underhill," History of European Ideas 8 no. 4/5 (Spring 1987), 552.



This awakening, from the psychological point of view, appears to be an intense form of the phenomenon of "conversion" and closely akin to those deep and permanent conversions of the adult type which some religious psychologists call "sanctification." It must not, however, be confused or identified with religious conversion as ordinarily understood: the sudden and emotional acceptance of theological beliefs which the self had previously either rejected or treated as conventions dwelling upon the margin of consciousness and having no meaning for her actual life. The mechanical process may be much the same; but the material involved, the results attained, belong to a higher order of reality.<sup>16</sup>

Along with these clarifying remarks, Underhill also asserts that this stage requires no particular theological leanings.

The second stage is termed purgation, or the purifying of the self. At this point, the mystic recognizes the stark contrast between self and "Divine Beauty." This is a phase of pain as the mystic must rid himself or herself of all elements which are not in harmony with God. The "Negative" aspect of this work involves the "stripping or purging away of those superfluous, unreal, and harmful things which dissipate the precious energies of the self."<sup>17</sup> The "Positive" aspect includes "a raising to their highest term, their purest state, of all that remains--the permanent elements of character."<sup>18</sup> Thus, Underhill sketches in detail the two acts of purgation: detachment and

---

<sup>16</sup>Underhill, Mysticism, 176.

<sup>17</sup>Underhill, Mysticism, 204.

<sup>18</sup>Underhill, Mysticism, 205.

mortification.

Illumination is the third stage used by Evelyn Underhill. Unlike the previous state, characterized by pain, this one is characterized by happiness due to a sense of Divine Presence (not to be confused with Union). Three types of experience often accompany this phase in the history of mysticism. Underhill outlines:

1. A joyous apprehension of the Absolute: that which many ascetic writers call "the practice of the Presence of God." This, however, is not to be confused with that unique consciousness of union with the divine which is peculiar to a later stage of mystical development. The self, though purified, still realizes itself as a separate entity over against God. It is not immersed in its Origin, but contemplates it. This is the "betrothal" rather than the "marriage" of the soul.
2. This clarity of vision may also be enjoyed in regard to the phenomenal world. The actual physical perceptions seem to be strangely heightened, so that the self perceives an added significance and reality in all natural things.
3. Along with this two-fold extension of consciousness, the energy of the intuitional or transcendental self may be enormously increased.<sup>19</sup>

The fourth stage Underhill calls the "dark night of the soul." This is the time when the mystic seems to feel abandoned by God. And, it is a period of ultimate purgation of the self. Often it is referred to as the "spiritual crucifixion." This stage is the final preparation for the last phase of mystical development.

---

<sup>19</sup>Underhill, Mysticism, 240.

Union, or the unitive life is the ultimate goal of the mystic's quest. Characteristic marks of this stage are highlighted by Underhill as:

(1) a complete absorption in the interests of the Infinite, under whatever mode It is apprehended by the self; (2) a consciousness of sharing Its strength, acting by Its authority, which results in a complete sense of freedom, an invulnerable serenity, and usually urges the self to some form of heroic effort or creative activity; (3) the establishment of the self as a "power for life," a centre of energy, an actual parent of spiritual vitality in other men.<sup>20</sup>

Some conclusions can tentatively be drawn from this "breeze" through Underhill's first major book. The first is that she looked for and developed themes from the similarities found between mystics. Thus, she was not overly interested or intrigued by unusual elements, which she often attributed to varying temperaments. Secondly, in order to accomplish a study on similarities, Underhill had to read widely from the lives of the mystics. Thus, she had become highly proficient in this area. Thirdly, she was preeminently concerned with developing a framework within which mystics could be commonly understood. This required emphasis on progress through stages. Lastly, at this point in her life and writing, Underhill was not, as has earlier been mentioned, tied to examining mysticism under any particular theological umbrella. She was convinced that Christian and non-christian mystics had more in common than

---

<sup>20</sup>Underhill, Mysticism, 416.

separating differences. Thus, this study of mysticism was quite "ecumenical." It is evident that in this first volume about mysticism, Underhill revealed the parameters of her thought<sup>21</sup> as it had developed by 1911.

### Mysticism as a Developing Concept

The next few years for Evelyn Underhill were years in which a continual formation in regard to mysticism can be detected.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it will prove enlightening for this study to consider Underhill's use of mysticism on a continuum which begins with Mysticism and culminates with Worship. This model will be helpful for probing the progression of mysticism which is the subject for this chapter. With her initial thoughts on mysticism as the basis for this discussion, the author's intent is to now consider the shifts or changes which became apparent throughout Underhill's writing.

### Evidence from Practical Mysticism. Practical Mysticism

---

<sup>21</sup>Greene, "The Thought of Evelyn Underhill," 553.

<sup>22</sup>For example, refer to Alice Selby Boyack, "Evelyn Underhill's Interpretation of the Spiritual Life" (Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1964), 39. She states, "During the next ten years [following 1911] she developed her interpretation of the spiritual life as the expression of mysticism." Also, see Dana Greene, "The Thought of Evelyn Underhill", 550. She claims, "The most important issue for the historian of ideas to address in an evaluation of Underhill's thought is that of the development and continuity in her ideas." Likewise consider Bishop Lumsden's "Introduction" in Life as Prayer. He also specifies a growth in wisdom and spiritual insight (15). Numerous other references are available in most any ambitious study of the life of Evelyn Underhill.

effectively portrayed the continuing evolvement of Underhill's understanding of mysticism. It must be examined, however, within the context of the war, for she was concurrently writing prolifically on that subject as well. The fact that it was sent to the publisher during the outbreak of World War I underlines the belief of the author as to the mystic's complete involvement within in the world, rather than a flight away from it. Her concern was that mysticism often was misunderstood by many as leading to a quietist approach to life. To the contrary, she wrote with the war in the recesses of her mind,

Yet it [mystical consciousness] does not wrap its initiates in a selfish and other-worldly calm, isolate them from the pain and effort of the common life. Rather it gives them renewed vitality; administering to the human spirit not--as some suppose--a soothing draught, but the most powerful of stimulants. Stayed upon eternal realities, that spirit will be far better to endure and profit from the stern discipline which the race is now called to undergo, than those who are wholly at the mercy of events: better able to discern the real from the illusory issues, and to pronounce judgment on the new problems, new difficulties, new fields of activity now disclosed.<sup>23</sup>

In many ways Practical Mysticism is the simplification and condensation of Mysticism. Like the earlier work, it presents the movement in the mystic's life and shares from the vast array of mystics their enlightening experiences, and favors the use of "Reality" or "Absolute" or "Beauty" to refer to God. However, a subtle movement, or rather

---

<sup>23</sup>Underhill, Practical Mysticism, 13-14.

intensity, of thought can be detected in the latter piece. This movement is the utter conviction and determination to present mysticism as an integrating feature of the spiritual life. Towards the end of this document, Underhill reasserts her conviction about the incarnational nature of mysticism.

So, what is being offered to you is not merely a choice amongst new states of consciousness, new emotional experiences--though these are indeed involved in it--but, above all else, a larger and intenser life, a career, a total consecration to the interests of the Real. This life shall not be abstract and dreamy, made up, as some imagine, of negations. It shall be violently practical and affirmative; giving scope for a limitless activity of will, heart, and mind working within the rhythms of the Divine Idea.<sup>24</sup>

Evidence from five important articles. Furthermore, consideration of the progression of Underhill's thought can be accomplished with an examination of five articles. As will become evident, these readily articulate the changing attitude Underhill had toward mysticism. The first to be considered is "The Mystic and the Corporate Life" written in 1915 and reprinted in The Essentials of Mysticism. Secondly, attention will be given to "Essentials of Mysticism" written in 1920 and reprinted in the book with the same title. Thirdly, an exploration will be made of "Sources of Power in Human Life" which appeared in The Hibbert Journal in 1921. Additionally, attention will be given to "Our Two-Fold Relation to Reality" which also was published in The Hibbert Journal in 1925. Lastly,

---

<sup>24</sup>Underhill, Practical Mysticism, 188.

consideration of "What is Mysticism" written in 1936 and reprinted in Life as Prayer must be noted.

The author has chosen to examine these articles for two reasons. The first is that they are less frequently considered in studies of this nature than the more familiar pieces of Underhill's work. Hence, information gleaned from them will provide new material for thoughtful reflection. Secondly, they provide evidence for the evolutionary aspect of Underhill's concept of mysticism since they span in time from 1915 to 1936.

The purpose of "The Mystic and the Corporate Life" is to dispel the notion that mystics are those who seek religious experience outside the Christian community. Underhill recognizes this critique as being one of the most frequent objections to mysticism, and also one of the most inaccurate. Therefore, through a short tracing of historical evidence, she puts forth the argument that, contrary to popular opinion, the mystic is often more deeply involved in the community of the faith because of one's mystical tendencies, and not in spite of them. To this effect, she maintained,

Yet this common opinion that the mystic is a lonely soul, wholly absorbed in his vertical relation with God, that his form of religious life represents an opposition to, and an implicit criticism of, the corporate and institutional form of religious life; this is decisively contradicted by history, which show us, again and again, the great mystics as the loyal children of the great religious institutions, and forces us to admit that here as in other departments of human

activity the corporate and the individual life are intimately plaited together.<sup>25</sup>

She does not suggest, however, that mystics have existed who did not adhere to this balance between the individual and institutional. These she terms "rebel-types", though she still considered them truly spiritual. George Fox, she reasoned, belonged to this group of mystics.

Underhill desired for people to understand the interrelatedness of the church and the mystic; that one could not exist very well without the presence of the other. To close her article, she used an analogy of a ship to describe this relationship. "The land they see, and of which they report to us, is the land towards which the Ship of the Church is going. They are like the look-out men upon the cross-trees, assuring us from time to time that she is still upon her course."<sup>26</sup>

Juxtaposed to the prior article in The Essentials of Mysticism is the second piece to consider which was written five years after the first article. While the first is thoroughly convinced of the dependency created between the

---

<sup>25</sup>Evelyn Underhill, "The Mystic and the Corporate Life," Interpreter 11, no. 2 (Jan. 1915): 144. Reprinted in The Essentials of Mysticism (reprint; New York: AMS Press, 1976).

Note: this is the last time that the term "mysticism" was used as part of a title in any of Underhill's following books. This fact alone suggests a progression in thought from intrigue with mysticism, to, as will become apparent throughout the remainder of this thesis, devout espousal of the spiritual life of which mysticism is an essential component.

<sup>26</sup>Underhill, "The Mystic and the Corporate Life," 160.



mystic and the church (a noticeable movement from the earlier writings on the subject), the second article appears to be a step back along the progression continuum. On the whole, it seems to represent mysticism in much of the same manner as her classic work on the subject. Hence, it is plausible to surmise that Underhill was indeed fluctuating between two rather contrary positions during these intermittent years.

The first essential fact, in the article at hand, that she deemed necessary for the mystic is a primary interest and consciousness of the living God coupled with a desire to commune with Him. Additionally, she states a traditional theological framework is not essential to the mystical way. She asserts, "We cannot honestly say that there is any wide difference between the Brahman, Sūfi, or Christian mystic at their best. They are far more like each other than they are like the average believer in their several creeds. What is essential is the way the mystic feels about his Deity."<sup>27</sup>

The second essential fact outlined in this article, is the development which must occur within the mystic. Underhill explained,

The mystic way is best understood as a process of sublimation, which carries the correspondence of the self with the Universe up to higher levels than those on which our normal consciousness works. Just as the normal

---

<sup>27</sup>Evelyn Underhill, "The Essentials of Mysticism." Quest 2 no. 2 (Jan. 1920): 4. Reprinted in The Essentials of Mysticism.

consciousness stands over and against the unconscious, which, with its buried impulses and its primitive and infantile cravings, represents a cruder reaction of the organism to the external world; so does the developed mystical life stand over against normal consciousness, with its preoccupations and its web of illusions . . ."<sup>28</sup>

As with Mysticism, Underhill draws from a historical study of the mystics to determine common phases of progression. The remainder of the document explores the traditional three stages with short excursions to discuss symbols and visions and similar phenomenon.

A year after the last article, "Sources of Power in Human Life" appeared in The Hibbert Journal. Writing in the aftermath of World War I and aware of the continuing influence of the Enlightenment, Underhill acquiesced that the spiritual life of England's society had become dry due to an unfulfilled hunger of the human soul. She claimed that as the physical body needs exercise, and the mind needs projects for engagement, and the emotions need expression, so does the soul needs its share of involvement. This, she contended, was lacking in England's society.

The cure for this ill, Underhill asserted, is a recognition of the spiritual life as the source for giving true meaning to the universe. Characteristically, she said that the mystics have insight to share with society on exactly this dilemma. She related, "The mystics have given many names to this voice and this message. But all agree

---

<sup>28</sup>Underhill, "The Essentials of Mysticism," 6.

that the world we commonly live in is not so much unreal as half real. We have got it out of proportion, because there is something--to them obvious--which we commonly leave out."<sup>29</sup> She referred to the mystic, Jacob Boehme, who suggested that the whole person is aware of three worlds of being: the physical world, the world of creativity which inspires the prior, and the world of spiritual energy. The lack of meaning in society, Underhill attributed to an ignorance of this third world and the source of power it can project into the other two realms of living. Thus, she submitted,

Mysticism, which is the science of the spirit as psychology is the science of the mind, has for its object the introduction of our consciousness into the third world; that world of eternal beauty and significance which is not separated from us, but, as another great mystic observed, "absent only from those who do not perceive it." Its aim is to arouse and educate the spiritual principle already latent in us, and give it its rightful place.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, Underhill contended in this article that this vision which mysticism opens to the seeker must be accompanied by discipline, which is the person's training to become proficient in this awareness.

It is accurate to state that this article was an attempt to open the eyes of Underhill's contemporaries to see beyond the depression of the current physical world to

---

<sup>29</sup>Evelyn Underhill, "Sources of Power in Human Life," The Hibbert Journal 19 no. 3 (April 1921): 387.

<sup>30</sup>Underhill, "Sources of Power in Human Life," 388.

the unleashed potentials available to those who would probe into the deeper realms of life. Moreover, this article is a demonstration that Evelyn Underhill was again moving forward on the continuum of mysticism. For example, notice that mysticism is discussed in relation to the spiritual life, rather than discussing it alone. Also, she attends to the needed corporate nature of the spiritual life. This is made convincingly clear when Underhill admits,

Therefore, since most of us are weaklings, if we wish to further our latent capacity for that life we should draw together; obtaining from our incorporation the herd-advantages of corporate enthusiasm, unity of aim, mutual protection, and forming a nucleus to which others can adhere. Thus the strong will be saved from the evils of individualism and the weak will receive support.<sup>31</sup>

Published in The Hibbert Journal in 1925 (four years after the previously discussed article) was Evelyn Underhill's article entitled "Our Two-Fold Relation to Reality." It proposed that two concepts must be kept in relation to each other if meaning is to be deduced from human experience. These two concepts are the "historical, natural, and contingent; [and] the timeless, supernatural

---

<sup>31</sup>Underhill, "Sources of Power in Human Life," 397-400. In addition to admitting her conviction that mysticism needs to be propagated within community, she also suggests that the formation of "hives of the spirit" might be necessary for advancement in recognition of the third world. These groups would be ruled only by faith, hope, and charity. The goal, she claimed, "must be the unification of idea, emotion, and action; the redirection of energy from lower to higher and more universal interests under the unique impulsion of the love of God."

and absolute."<sup>32</sup> Underhill called not for a rejection of the natural in order to become more spiritual; but a deepening of the natural in light of humankind's relation to the spiritual. Furthermore, she praised Christianity for its recognition of this fact! (The traces of quasi-equality between religions seems to have ceased.)

Secondly, also important in recognizing her progression on the mysticism continuum previously mentioned, is Underhill's emphasis on the responsibilities for cultivation of a two-fold awareness for both the individual and the community. She strongly asserted, "For the individual, this means making a place in our flowing life for a deliberate self-orientation to the Eternal Order. For the community, it means providing an environment in which these interests can be cherished and taught."<sup>33</sup> Moreover, she entreated the church by saying, "The giving of such spiritual education [training necessary for growth in the spiritual life] should obviously be a prime interest of institutional religion: which has as its chief function the developing of this supernatural outlook among men, and the maintenance of conditions that support it."<sup>34</sup>

The last article to consider in this brief study on

---

<sup>32</sup>Evelyn Underhill, "Our Two-Fold Relation to Reality," The Hibbert Journal 23 no. 2 (Jan. 1925): 219.

<sup>33</sup>Underhill, "Our Two-Fold Relation to Reality," 221.

<sup>34</sup>Underhill, "Our Two-Fold Relation to Reality," 224-225.

Underhill's developing notion of mysticism is found in Life as Prayer. "What is Mysticism?" written in 1936 serves as a piece which solidifies for the student the mature Underhillian view of mysticism. The first striking characteristic of this document is its devotional tone which places mysticism, not as a separate concept to be considered, but as an integrating factor in the spiritual life. How does she now define it?

Mysticism, then, far from being abnormal, is an essential part of all religion which is fully and deeply alive; it is the light which the mystics cast on the normal spiritual life, their disclosure of the landscape in which we really live, not their occasional excursions into an abnormal spiritual life, which gives them their great importance.

. . . Mysticism is the passionate longing of the soul for God, the Unseen Reality, loved, sought and adored in Himself for Himself alone.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, "a mystic is not a person who has queer experiences; but a person for whom God is the one reality of life, the supreme Object of love."<sup>36</sup> Underhill also takes this opportunity to delineate between a Christian and non-christian mystic.<sup>37</sup> First, she suggests that mysticism is

---

<sup>35</sup>Evelyn Underhill, "What is Mysticism?" London: A.R. Mowbray (1936): 106-107. Reprinted in Life as Prayer.

<sup>36</sup>Underhill, "What is Mysticism?", 105.

<sup>37</sup>Also indicative of this differentiation is a letter dated March 1, 1933 to Conrad Noel. She states, "So far as I can see, the sense of 'absorption' with nature and with other beings is far more characteristic of the nature-mystics and the pantheists than of the real Christian mystics." Charles Williams, ed. The Letters of Evelyn Underhill (Westminster:

rooted in the New Testament. And, secondly, she asserts that non-christian mystics are interested in a flight from this world, while a Christian mystic is aware that moments of ecstasy must necessarily be followed by deep involvement within the common everyday situations of this world.

The last few pages of this article contain an exposition on the development of the mystic. However, unlike previous works, here Underhill assured her readers that the three stages of progression are to be very general categories for the purposes of explanation only, and not as rigid descriptions which must be followed universally for one to be considered a true mystic.

Evidence from Worship. Evelyn Underhill was in her sixties when Worship was published in 1936. According to at least one biographer, the intensity with which Underhill completed this project, sapped her energy and strength; and quite possibly, shortened her life which ended at the early age of 65.<sup>38</sup> The purpose of this book is to explore the realities of worship as the response of humankind to God. Perhaps the most poignant statement that can be made regarding this volume is that it demonstrates the overwhelming shift Underhill had made in her life. She began with a study of mysticism, and ended with a study of

---

Christian Classics, 1989), 209.

<sup>38</sup>Christopher J.R. Armstrong, Evelyn Underhill: An Introduction to Her Life and Writings (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 241.

worship. Little can be said which adds to this fact.

Bishop Barkway, writing of this very progression articulates,

When one compares Worship with Mysticism, the chief book of her earlier period, then the immense change of emphasis which has taken place in the intervening years is immediately obvious. The latter book is predominantly incarnational, institutional, and sacramental. The words used are different, for example the word reality which occurs so frequently in her first books is almost entirely absent. There is less stress on mysticism. It is strange to notice that the word is not to be found in the index, nor the word contemplation. To a youthful reader the style of the book may seem flat when compared with the earlier: there are no purple patches; but its deeper maturity makes this authoritative statement of her final point of view a much sounder exposition of the fundamental facts of life and religion.<sup>39</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter has traced the continuum of Evelyn Underhill's understanding of mysticism. It began with consideration given to her first major work on the subject, and concluded, or culminated, with attention to her last predominant piece. Drawing from these discoveries, it is necessary to briefly suggest the characteristics of mysticism as Underhill embraced it in her mature years.

First, mysticism is incarnational. It is not an imposed doctrine on some phase or aspect of religion; it is the integrating factor in the spiritual life. As such, mysticism offers a window in which to learn how to cooperate

---

<sup>39</sup>Margaret Cropper, The Life of Evelyn Underhill (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1958), 196.



with God in carrying out His efforts on earth.  
Contemplation and action are held in creative tension.  
Mysticism is thoroughly Christian.

Secondly, mysticism is institutional. It is not a license to seek religious experience outside the church. Rather, it is the sustaining vision of the church. Moreover, not only does the mystic need the church, but the church needs the mystic. Together, each is protected against their unfortunate tendencies; and each is enriched and vitalized by the presence of the other.

Thirdly, mysticism is practical. Contrary to inaccurate presuppositions, it is not a proposal to withdraw from the world. Moreover, it actually deepens the significance of the most mundane activities of common life. "The Sacrament of the Present Moment" is a reality for the true mystic. In addition, mysticism is not something only for certain personalities predisposed to such tendencies; it is available to all who wish to cultivate a disciplined life.

Fourthly, mysticism is motivated by love alone. This rejects the frequent notion that the mystic is a seeker after bizarre experiences with occult forces. The mystic is motivated only by love for God which ushers forth a life intent on communion with Him.

Fifthly, though Underhill still believed that mystics needed and did progress to more fuller experiences of union

with God, she considered this progression more loosely. In other words, she still used the classic three stages (purgation, illumination, and union) to suggest the common features of growth evident in the lives of the mystics. However, she did not make these rigid, nor did she emphasize their part in mysticism as she did in her first volume.

Grace Adolphsen Brame names Evelyn Underhill as one of the most balanced writers in her field.<sup>40</sup> It is with her balanced view of mysticism that this author will seek to respond to popular criticisms of mysticism in the following chapter.

---

<sup>40</sup>Grace Adolphsen Brame, ed. Evelyn Underhill: The Ways of the Spirit (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993), 32.

## CHAPTER 4

## Misconceptions of Mysticism

The driving conviction of this thesis is that mysticism is often misunderstood; and therefore, rejected as a viable Christian term. As expressed in Chapter 1, it is this author's intent to address common misconceptions based on Evelyn Underhill's approach to Christian mysticism. In the previous chapter, her mature concept of mysticism was examined in preparation to make some constructive criticisms regarding frequent interpolations of the term. It is this task which now must be undertaken.

Kataphatic and Apophatic Methods

Prior to a critical discussion, however, a cursory look at the broader view of Christian spirituality must occur to establish a more comprehensive background of the subject. Such a study reveals that behind the notion of mysticism is a larger debate: how does one attain knowledge of God?

Kataphatic. The dominate path in Western Christendom has been what is termed the kataphatic path, also known as via positiva. This theological method, according to the Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, "relies on the doctrine of creation, with its implication that marks of the Creator are necessarily discernible to a greater or lesser extent on his work of creation, and more particularly

on the doctrine of man as made in the image of God."<sup>1</sup>

Hence, kataphatic theology is the attempt of the mind to gain a positive understanding of who God is in relation to His creation. Tilden Edwards also remonstrates that "The kataphatic underlines positive images of God and tries to clarify and affirm these images. This focus on the via affirmativa [via positiva] underscores the human capacity to reach God through creature, images, and symbols."<sup>2</sup>

Apophatic. Juxtaposed to the previous method, is the path of apophatic theology, or via negativa. Essentially, this perspective "is a way of using language about God which keeps constantly before its user the fact that human language is hopelessly inadequate to use of the ineffable God."<sup>3</sup> This path seeks to preserve the mystery of God by continual recognition that perhaps the most one may know of God is deduced by what He is not. Characterizing this path, Edwards states that "God is best known in obscure awareness."<sup>4</sup> Thus, all expressions of God are grossly inadequate. Since this method is less familiar to Western minds, perhaps a brief citing from T.S. Eliot's East Coker

---

<sup>1</sup>Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds. The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 597. Note: Kataphatic is sometimes spelled cataphatic as a transliteration from the Greek.

<sup>2</sup>Tilden Edwards, Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 4.

<sup>3</sup>The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, 596.

<sup>4</sup>Edwards, 4.

will aid in illumination of this concept.

In order to arrive at what you do not know  
 You must go by a way which is the way of  
 ignorance.  
 In order to possess what you do not possess  
 You must go by the way of dispossession.  
 In order to arrive at what you are not  
 You must go through the way in which you are not.  
 And what you do not know  
 is the only thing you know  
 And what you own is what you do not own  
 And where you are is where you are not.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout church history, the differing views of kataphatic and apophatic methods have often been employed separately resulting in an overemphasis of one system over the other.<sup>6</sup> In the Western church the emphasis has been on the kataphatic. Thus, skepticism has abounded when assertions of inner experience, or mystery, are attributed to the Christian life. While, certainly, it would only result in the opposing error if the apophatic method were employed to the neglect of the kataphatic; it is indeed pertinent that an appropriate balance between the two be established. Charles Williams is noted as describing the relationship which should exist between these two theological methods. He states, "Both methods, the

---

<sup>5</sup>Cited by Kenneth Leech, Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), 144. Taken from T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets 1944 ed.

<sup>6</sup>For example see Harvey D. Egan, "Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticism," Theological Studies 39 (Sept. 1978): 399-426. He suggests, "Despite the strong evidence for both the via negativa and the via affirmativa in the Christian mystical tradition, many contemporary authors and spiritual directors still insist on eliminating one of the ways."

affirmative way and the negative way, were to co-exist, one might almost say to coinhere, since each was to be the key to the other."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Tilden Edwards asserts, "Though some people would see an ultimate conflict between the apophatic and kataphatic, especially in their relative weighting of 'negative' and 'positive' languages, I think they are complementary and mutually corrective."<sup>8</sup>

This discussion is important background for any critical commentary on mysticism because it forges an indispensable recognition. That is, even though the Western approach to God is more thoroughly familiar with the kataphatic method, as a method, it is no more important nor singularly correct than the apophatic approach. Thus, it is with this knowledge in mind that some contemporary critiques will be considered in this chapter.

#### Misconceptions Outlined and Considered

As mentioned previously, this author is concerned that people in general, and specifically, Christians, regard mysticism as New Age or unorthodox.<sup>9</sup> Confirmation of this notion can be gathered rather quickly by the raised eyebrows or the concerned voice when the subject of mysticism is

---

<sup>7</sup>The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, 597.

<sup>8</sup>Edwards, 5.

<sup>9</sup>An example of this is the recent categorization of Evelyn Underhill's The Mystic Way 1992 edition and Practical Mysticism 1987 edition by Ariel Press as indicated on the back cover of each book. Ariel has located them under Religion--New Age.

approached. Furthermore, skepticism raises its head in numerous broadcasts and publications. Usually, it is construed that one is either a Christian, and hence not a mystic; or a mystic, and hence associated with the New Age or a similar cult related to Eastern mysticism and obviously opposed to orthodox Christianity. Infrequently, it is thought in Christian circles that one may be a devout Christian mystic. Simply stated, it is assumed that the two [Christianity and mysticism] are mutually exclusive.

The skepticism surrounding mysticism has not changed very much since Evelyn Underhill first began to write on the subject. Of the negative climate surrounding her day, she acquiesced,

In spite of the great Christian mystical tradition which we have inherited, and because of the bad company the word often keeps, many people assume that it is merely another name for religious queerness or religious vagueness: for visions, ecstasies and other symptoms of psychic instability, and even far less reputable forms of abnormality.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, in his book What Are They Saying About Mysticism? Harvey D. Egan relates some common dispositions about mysticism. He asserts,

"The topic 'mysticism' frequently evokes strong reactions. Mass media tend to treat mysticism as allegedly dealing with the unreal, the abstract, the vague, the poetic, the emotional, the

---

<sup>10</sup>Evelyn Underhill, "What is Mysticism?" printed in Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1946); reprinted as Life as Prayer and Other Writings of Evelyn Underhill, ed. Lucy Menzies (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), 105.

parapsychological, or even the 'spooky.' Many Christians have problems with mysticism. For those influenced by the Continental-European Protestant theologians . . . mysticism means little more than Greek-infested, heretical Christianity."<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the title of his book, Mysticism: An Evangelical Option?, written by Winfried Corduan immediately portrays the rampant skepticism found in Christian circles, and more particularly, those with an evangelical flavor.

Furthermore, Georges A. Barrois comments in an article on mysticism: "It is a fact that many modern Christians, and among them some theologians, are prejudiced against mysticism."<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Kenneth Leech suggests that "the suspicion of mysticism among many Christians has led to the widespread idea that the mystical way, while it may be a valid form of experience, is a minority vocation within the Christian frame."<sup>13</sup> If this is indeed the position among the majority of Christian persons, and evidence supports the

---

<sup>11</sup>Harvey D. Egan, What Are They Saying About Mysticism? (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 1.

<sup>12</sup>Georges A. Barrois, "Mysticism--What Is It?", Theology Today 4 (1947), 190. He cites the definition of mysticism as recorded in Webster's New International Dictionary (2 ed., 1944) as evidence. The definition reads, "the theory, practice, or spirit of mystics. Cf. ecstasy." . . . The doctrine or belief that direct knowledge of God, of spiritual truth, of ultimate reality, etc., is attainable through immediate intuition, insight, or illumination, and in a way differing from ordinary sense-perception or ratiocination. . . . Hence, vague speculation; also, a vagary; a belief without foundation." Moreover, this author has found that Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1980) yields essentially the same definition.

<sup>13</sup>Leech, 139.



affirmative of this claim; then, an examination must be initiated to determine whether or not this skepticism warranted.

Misconceptions outlined. Harvey Egan names several misconceptions in his introduction to An Anthology of Christian Mysticism. These provide an appropriate framework to begin addressing criticisms of mysticism, and are summarized as follows:

- 1) Equation of mysticism with irrationalism or impracticality, parapsychological phenomena, occult and demonology.
- 2) Reduction of mysticism to ecstasy variously triggered by outside forces such as drugs. Included in this reduction is repressed eroticism, or insanity.
- 3) Identification of mysticism with religious experience in general terms. Usually included is a rejection of ecclesiastical life ranging from sacraments to authority.
- 4) Taken from Walter T. Stace is the position that mystical experience is a complete unification with deity so that no difference exists.
- 5) Equation of mysticism with supernatural suspension of the laws of nature.
- 6) Distinction between biblical and prophetic religions and Oriental mysticism as mutually exclusive. Within this view is an opinion that mysticism is not a concept found within the biblical text.<sup>14</sup>

Misconceptions considered. Drawing from the conclusions gathered from Underhill's mature concept of mysticism, discussion on each of the previous misconceptions will be attempted. The first interpolation noted begs for a response on at least two levels. First, one of Underhill's

---

<sup>14</sup>Harvey, Egan, S.J., An Anthology of Christian Mysticism (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), xxiv-xxv.

most frequent themes in regard to mysticism is that it must be thoroughly practical; and if it fails to be, then it is not genuine Christian mysticism. The reader is urged to recall one of Underhill's most pivotal works, Practical Mysticism. She frequently addressed mysticism as completely enmeshed with this world, not some esoteric attention to something beyond or apart from earthly existence. For Underhill, mysticism was thoroughly incarnational and integrated, or it was false. Thus, awareness of Eternity did not suggest rejection of this world, but punctuated finite existence with meaning, which adds fullness and purpose to all aspects of it. For example, consider the following letters written to two of her correspondents. Written to G.F. on Christmas 1936, Underhill shares, "I do hope your Christmas has had a little touch of Eternity in among the rush and pitter patter and all. It always seems such a mixing of this world and the next--but that after all is the idea!"<sup>15</sup> And, in a letter to A.B. dated August 1, 1927, Underhill urged the recipient to "remember all life comes to you from God, and is to be used for Him--so live in it all, and so get the necessary variety and refreshment without which religious intensity soon becomes stale and hard."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, in "What is Mysticism?" she asserted,

---

<sup>15</sup>Charles Williams, ed. The Letters of Evelyn Underhill (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1989), 253.

<sup>16</sup>Williams, 175.

Mysticism, then, far from being abnormal, is an essential part of all religion which is fully and deeply alive; it is the light which the mystics cast on the normal spiritual life, their disclosure of the landscape in which we really live, not their occasional excursions into an abnormal spiritual life, which gives them their great importance.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, Underhill did not reduce mysticism to dapppling in the occult and its activities including telepathy and clairvoyance. For her, Christian mystical pursuits are motivated by love of God, which necessarily rejects participation in the occult or similar groups and their activities. Egan claims that "by delineating mysticism as a way of life which focuses exclusively on loving God and seeking union with Him, Underhill clearly distinguishes herself from commentators who emphasize mysticism as a series of unrelated psychological peak experiences, or as altered states of consciousness."<sup>18</sup> She summed up her view of spirituality in the modification of a famous statement made by John of the Cross: in the end, we are judged not by our mysticism, but by our love.<sup>19</sup>

However, Underhill did readily admit that some mystics do experience ecstatic experiences; but, these experiences do not form the foundation nor the motivation for Christian

---

<sup>17</sup>Underhill, "What is Mysticism?", 106.

<sup>18</sup>Egan, What Are They Saying About Mysticism?, 49.

<sup>19</sup>Dana Greene, "Adhering to God: The Message of Evelyn Underhill for Our Times," Spirituality Today (Spring 1987): 32.

mystics. They are secondary phenomena of a way of life. Douglas Steere, who has studied many lives and writings of the mystics, including Evelyn Underhill, claims that, "From beginning to end the Christian mystics repudiate such a superficial treatment [equating mysticism with emotional ecstasy] and regard ecstasy as only a minor accompaniment of that transforming experience."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Underhill frequently alleged that these phenomena are often the result of an unbalanced or immature mystic, and cannot, on that basis, be a determining factor in rejecting the validity of the term.

The second false notion regarding mysticism recorded by Egan is that it is the result of insanity brought about by drugs or other outside influences and may include repressed eroticism. Underhill was quite familiar with the psychological examinations of mysticism, yet she did not attribute the psychological development of mystics to insanity. Her tracings revealed quite the opposite. In her article, "What is Mysticism?", she addressed this consideration:

It is true that certain abnormal states of mind and even of body, which as yet we hardly understand, do sometimes appear in connection with mysticism, attracting an attention out of all proportion to their importance. But they can never be more than its by-products; and the tendency to exaggerate them has, more than any other cause, brought misunderstanding and

---

<sup>20</sup>Douglas V. Steere, "The Meaning of Mysticism within Christianity," Religious Life 22 no. 4 (Autumn 1953): 519.

discredit on the great souls of the mystics.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, mysticism for Underhill was not a consciousness that could in any way be sought by an individual. To the contrary, it is a way of life opened to one as the pure result of grace given by God; and only then, cultivated by the mystic. Thus, any initiation of a mystical way of life was controlled by God, not the individual. The mystic is merely a responder to grace, not an initiator.

Perhaps, most telling of Underhill's position on the subject of abnormalities within the mystics, is the fact that as she progressed through life, she placed less emphasis on the psychological development of the mystics and more on God to whom they longed to know. Hence, her articles which were reviewed in the previous chapter as representative of her mature views on mysticism, lend little attention to this aspect of The Way.

Lastly, in response to the accusation of repression, the mystics do not reject areas of life,<sup>22</sup> as critics often

---

<sup>21</sup>Underhill, "What is Mysticism?", 105.

<sup>22</sup>For a discussion on ecstasy, refer to "The Essentials of Mysticism" located in The Essentials of Mysticism (reprint; New York: AMS Press, 1976), 22-23. Underhill here suggests that a test applies to the person which differentiates between the true mystic state and abnormal symptoms of emotional visionaries. "We have a test which we can apply to the ecstatic; and which separates the results of nervous disorder from those of spiritual transcendence. 'What fruit dost thou bring back from this thy vision?' . . . And the answer is: 'An ordered life in every state.'" She continues, "So, ordered correspondence with each level of existence, physical

suppose, but live life to its fullest, according to Evelyn Underhill. Thus, it is not a rejection or repression, but rather a recognition of the deeper levels of meaning within human experience. Through her study of Evelyn Underhill's concept of mysticism, Dana Greene suggests that for the mystics

the desire for Reality, the movement of one's whole being in surrender to Reality is not done for personal gain or power or for curiosity, but only because of a desire to be united with Reality. Such union demands the entire redirection (not the denial) of all human powers--sensual, intellectual, and volitional--toward that which one loves.<sup>23</sup>

This understanding of mysticism which Underhill advocated does not fall prey the false accusations outlined in the second misconception of mysticism.

The third critique concerning mysticism reduces it to mere personal experience of God, including a rejection of the ecclesiastical tradition. Two aspects are normally mentioned. The first charge suggests that mystics elevate their experience to a place of authority, and hence, reduce the authority of the Church to a less important position. Secondly, as indicated by Winfried Corduan, who draws on a brief survey of mysticism from different traditions,

---

and spiritual, successive and eternal--a practical realization of the proportions of life--is the guarantee of the genuine character of that sublimation of consciousness which is called the mystic way; and this distinguishes it from the fantasies of psychic illness or the disguised self-indulgences of the dream-world."

<sup>23</sup>Greene, "Adhering to God," 28.

mysticism is accused of displacing biblical revelation with existential revelation.<sup>24</sup> How does the English mystic respond to these criticisms?

It has been acknowledged that the questing Underhill failed to realize the significance of the Church in the lives of mystics until the Baron convinced her of the error. However, Underhill, in retrospect, freely admitted that she had remained outside of the communion too long. Furthermore, the emphasis of her writing after this recognition was upon the mystic's involvement **within** the Church.<sup>25</sup> Keenly aware of just this very concern regarding mystics outside of the Church, Evelyn Underhill responded:

One of the commonest of the criticisms which are brought against the mystics is that they represent an unsocial type of religion; that their spiritual enthusiasms are personal and individual, and that they do not share or value the corporate life and institutions of the church or community to which they belong. Yet, as a matter of fact, the relation that does and should exist between personal religion and the corporate life of the church frequently appears in them in a peculiarly intense, a peculiarly interesting form; and in

---

<sup>24</sup>Winfried Corduan, Mysticism: An Evangelical Option? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 114. This frequent allegation wrongly assumes that mysticism must succumb to the dualities of one's own tradition, though with a leaning to the opposite extreme. For example, the frequent evangelical tendency is to elevate the Written Word at the expense, and often neglect, of the Living Word [Jesus Christ]. Thus, when mysticism is approached, it is faulted for stressing the opposite pole in the critic's dualistic structure (Jesus Christ and His continuing presence in the world through the operation of the Holy Spirit). Hence, due to this inaccurate subjection, the argument is nullified.

<sup>25</sup>Refer to the discussion of "The Mystic and the Corporate Life" in Chapter 3.

their lives, perhaps, more easily than elsewhere, we may discern the principles which do or should govern the relation of the individual to the community.<sup>26</sup>

Elsewhere, Underhill even more strongly asserted,

". . . those enthusiasts for the corporate idea who condemn the mystics as religious egoists seem to forget that they are contradicting themselves; that if their vision of the Church of Christ as a mystical body be true, then the mystic's ascent to God cannot be a flight of the Alone. . . . the mystic is not merely a self going out on a solitary quest of Reality. He can, must, and does go only as a member of the whole body, performing as it were the function of a specialized organ."<sup>27</sup>

The corpus of materials which supports this position of Underhill could fill volumes of paper. Moreover, any examination of her life will reveal just how intimately she was tied to the Church by her active presence. However, with respect to brevity, it is only necessary to say that mysticism as Underhill conceived it in her mature years, did not fall prey to the individualistic error.

While certainly focusing on personal experience, does mysticism replace, or somehow reduce biblical revelation according to Underhill? Far from locating mysticism and the Bible in a polarization, Underhill propounded that, "all the doctrines and all the experiences characteristic of genuine Christian mysticism can be found in the New Testament; and I

---

<sup>26</sup>Evelyn Underhill, "The Mystic and the Corporate Life," Interpreter 11, no.2 (Jan. 1915): 144. Reprinted in The Essentials of Mysticism.

<sup>27</sup>Evelyn Underhill, "Mysticism and the Doctrine of Atonement," reprinted in The Essentials of Mysticism, 55.



believe that its emergence as a definite type of spiritual life coincides with the emergence of Christianity itself, in the person of its Founder."<sup>28</sup> Included in her studies on mysticism are Jesus, Paul, and the fourth Evangelist. Hence, to say that mysticism and biblical revelation are at odds, would be to disregard the practice and writing of Evelyn Underhill.

The fourth criticism against mysticism as acknowledged by Egan is a complete deification of the mystic so that no distinction can be determined between the person and God. It is admitted that mystics, including Underhill, speak of union with God as the final and ultimate stage in mystical progression. However, this union is not an intermingling of natures as one might suppose. On the contrary, it is simply the true place of intimate knowing between Creator and created, made possible only by complete and uninhibited relinquishment of self. Underhill drew on the common metaphor of the mystics to explain this reality: "I live in the ocean of God as a fish in the sea." She continued, "That is the life of union, of conscious abiding in God; the full expansion of man's spiritual possibilities, and full satisfaction of his deepest desires. It brings with it great creative power. Once more we come back for our best

---

<sup>28</sup>Evelyn Underhill, The Mystic Way (1913; reprint, Atlanta: Ariel Press, 1992), 7.

definition to St. Paul's 'I live, yet not I.'<sup>29</sup> Self-annihilation and deification are misinterpretations of this stage according to Underhill's view.

It is through the use of "union" that mystics often are accused of pantheism.<sup>30</sup> Responding to this allegation, Egan (Underhill would agree) maintains that differentiation between God and the mystic continues. And furthermore, the more intimate the union, the more the individuality of the mystic is confirmed and enhanced.<sup>31</sup> In her article entitled "What is Mysticism?" Underhill distinguishes between "inclusive mysticism" and "exclusive mysticism." The first is the recognition of all of life as material for transformation. Its basis is the Incarnation and continuance in the Church with the Sacraments. The second is a renunciation of this world in favor of unmitigated other-worldliness. This exclusive mysticism is to be distinguished from the Christian form, and it results in pantheism, or, as Underhill articulates, "sloppy claims to be in tune with the Infinite."<sup>32</sup> Thus, to suggest that Christian mysticism (inclusive) results in pantheism is false in the mystical school of thought according to Underhill.

---

<sup>29</sup>Underhill, "What is Mysticism?", 118.

<sup>30</sup>Corduan, 114. He makes this claim.

<sup>31</sup>Harvey Egan, An Anthology of Christian Mysticism, xix.

<sup>32</sup>Underhill, Life as Prayer, 116.

Another criticism against mysticism is that it merely denotes the miraculous. Thus, confusion between mysticism and charismatic phenomena results. This tendency has really been the result of the neo-pentecostal movement of the 20th century, and therefore, is not directly addressed by Evelyn Underhill. However, this author is certain that such equalization of the terms would be contrary to Underhill's conceptualization. Her writings do not reveal consideration of phenomena such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, healing, etc., and certainly they would not be viewed as congruent with the mystical **way of life**, being themselves merely **momentary experiences**.

Lastly, Egan reasons that the influence of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Friedrich Heiler, Albrecht Ritschl, Nathan Soderblom, Ernst Troeltsch, and Adolf Harnack contributed to the alienation of mysticism as a Christian term; and instead related it as merely pagan and neo-Platonic. Thus, according to this school, to speak of Christian mysticism is to suggest a contradiction of terms.<sup>33</sup> It has already been addressed in this chapter that Underhill espoused mysticism as a concept found in the Bible, and practiced by Jesus, Paul, and John the Evangelist. By the time she had developed a mature perception of mysticism, she was referring to Plotinus as pagan, not as authoritative for knowledge of mystical pursuits. Moreover, the

---

<sup>33</sup>Egan, An Anthology of Christian Mysticism, xxv.

characteristics of mysticism which she taught, do not contradict or conflict with Scriptural principles. Hence, to charge her concept as unchristian is to misrepresent her intentions, writings, and ultimately, her life.

Other criticisms are aimed at mysticism. For example, Winfried Corduan contends that mysticism minimizes sin and minimizes grace. As to the first claim, Underhill would remind him that for the mystic, awareness of sin is intensified. The more familiar the mystic becomes with God, the more completely horrified one becomes with oneself. Concurring with Isaiah, the mystic cries, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."<sup>34</sup> The process of purgation is undertaken precisely because of the mystic's intensified recognition of sin.

Moreover, Corduan levels this complaint of minimizing sin because he thinks that some Christian mystical systems suppose the mystic to already be in a relationship with God, and that realization of this fact, opposed to the work of grace, is the only missing link to enjoyment of this life. Thus, sin does not function as a separating factor. (Sin is death, and death is separation from God.) Contrary to his opinion, however, grace is the beginning point for the

---

<sup>34</sup>New American Standard Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1979), Isaiah 6:5.

mystic. Hence, sin is only overcome by grace; and grace alone, sets the mystic upon the path to Union. Evelyn Underhill addresses this seeming contradiction between grace as a free gift, and the progression towards Union that mysticism proposes by portraying them more in a paradox than opposite poles of a dualistic structure. In an article, she suggests, ". . . both these views of the Christian scheme have emerged and diverged from the same source. St. Paul, the greatest of all Christian mystics--soaked, too, in the idea of grace and of growth in grace, and deeply impressed with the fact of the soul's individual responsibility--is also supremely the theologian of the Atonement."<sup>35</sup> Thus, to suggest that the mystic disregards half of the fact, does not account for Underhill's understanding of the mystic way.

Furthermore, Corduan's complaint regarding the mystic's minimization of grace includes the allegation that self-purgation replaces grace in the mystic. This author is not surprised to find such a criticism made by an evangelical. The reasoning is that Christians from this particular theological arena sometimes suppose grace to be the only factor in living the Christian life, and often this is to the neglect of accompanying discipline. That is, grace is a free gift of God given to undeserving persons who willfully respond to God's initiation through Jesus Christ, period.

---

<sup>35</sup>Underhill, "Mysticism and the Doctrine of Atonement" printed in The Essentials of Mysticism, 46.

In response, however, this fact does not free the Christian from personal responsibility. Hence, the disciplines are not ends in themselves, but practices which place a person in positions to receive God's grace. Therefore, activity on both ends is required. For the mystic, this realization is not lightly dismissed. Personal responsibility for growth is a high priority because a holy God, by the very definition of His character, cannot tolerate union with unholy people. So, to realize this union that they seek, purgation must occur in order to rid themselves of all that is contrary to God's nature. This demands purgation, based in grace and made possible by God's constant help. It is not the mystic designing one's own program to relieve oneself of sin. It is a person, sensitive to the voice of God, who yields all aspects of one's life to God's use. And, an integral part of this process is God's initiated stage of purgation.

### Conclusion

This discussion has not exhausted the numerous criticisms of mysticism. However, it has laid a foundation in which a continuation of critical dialogue can exist. With an understanding of mysticism as Evelyn Underhill lived and taught, the reader is now equipped to interact with critics similar to the ones encountered in this chapter who may wish to disregard mysticism due to its negation in many circles.

Furthermore, this critical look at mysticism has offered a picture of hope. For even though rampant criticisms exist, it has been determined that an appropriate understanding of the subject can lay many fears regarding mysticism to rest. Moreover, in any of life's pursuits, nothing is undertaken which does not entail some element of risk. Why should we expect anything different from mysticism? Truly, it has been the source of various heresies and exaggerations. So has any other doctrine of Christianity. The annals of Church history are overflowing with stories of false notions, false teachings, and failed experiments. Nevertheless, this is not cause to suggest that the Church should cease. No, the Church must learn from its mistakes, and continue with a renewed sense of purpose and procedure. The same is applicable to mysticism.

This thesis has demonstrated that even though allegations can be leveled against certain proponents and approaches to mysticism, it still can be understood through the eyes of an orthodox mystic, Evelyn Underhill; and thus, similarly propagated for the Church's continued use.

Barrois raises a similar contention:

One might wonder if the mystical venture is worth the trial, since it is liable to be perverted in so many ways. It looks somehow like tight rope walking. It ought to be remarked, however, that the risks involved in mysticism are precisely the same as the risks of faith. Christian faith, too, is an adventure, and mystical experience is, after all, nothing else than the experience of faith

carried to its highest level.<sup>36</sup>

With its values being much greater than potential risks, the Church cannot afford to neglect the concept of mysticism and those mystics who so faithfully contribute to the life of the Body of Christ.

---

<sup>36</sup>Barrois, 197.



## CHAPTER 5

## Summary, Conclusion, and Suggestions

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the life and writings of Evelyn Underhill, a noted Christian mystic, in order to explore common misrepresentations regarding Christian mysticism. A study of this nature was deemed important due to the frequent misunderstandings of the term by persons in general, and Christians in specific.

Summary

The first sub-problem addressed was a biographical look of Evelyn Underhill, an English mystic (1875-1941). This survey produced information on her spiritual development as it was noticed by friends and evident in her writings. The most formational period of her life was determined to be 1921-1925 when she was in a direction relationship with Baron Friedrich von Hügel. Results of this experience included significant changes with regard to the Church, the poor, and the ideological shift from primarily theocentric tendencies to more thoroughly Christocentric perspectives. Chapter 2 highlighted this progression evident in her life and as it found its way into her writings.

The second sub-problem focused on Evelyn Underhill's concept of mysticism, with special attention given to what was termed, her mature concept. Thus, Chapter 3 began with Underhill's first contribution to mystical literature, Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's

Spiritual Consciousness. Drawing from this text, her initial understanding of mysticism was explored. Then, attention was given to mysticism as a developing concept. Considered as informational to this progression was Practical Mysticism, "The Mystic and the Corporate Life," "Essentials of Mysticism," "Sources of Power in Human Life," "Our Two-Fold Relation to Reality," "What is Mysticism?", and Worship. The author traced developments of Underhill's understanding of mysticism through these sources to make determinations regarding her mature concept. Characteristics of mysticism as Underhill embraced in her mature years were found to be: incarnational, institutional, practical, motivated by love, and evidencing an element of progression.

Chapter 4 focused on the third sub-problem which was a consideration of frequently held misconceptions regarding mysticism, and a response to them drawing from Underhill's concept. Misrepresentations recorded by Harvey Egan were examined. They are: an equation of mysticism and irrationalism or impracticality, mysticism as merely ecstasy caused by repression or insanity, mysticism as general religious experience with a rejection of ecclesiastical authority, deification as the result of mysticism, equation of mysticism and supernatural events, and belief that mysticism is unbiblical. Additionally, two criticisms mentioned by Winfried Corduan were considered. He judged

mysticism to be a minimization of sin and a minimization of grace.

Each of these allegations was explored using the basic characteristics of Underhill's mature concept of mysticism, and allowing her, through her writings, to respond. The conclusion found was that these criticisms were unfounded in her understanding of the term. Thus, it was postulated, that to reject mysticism as a whole based on these miscounts is inappropriate, and a disservice both to the way of life which an orthodox mystic lived and shared, and to the Church as a whole.

### Conclusion

Although mysticism has been expounded by numerous proponents, and as such has almost as many definitions as adherents, this thesis focused on one mystic, Evelyn Underhill. The purpose for this strategy was to enable a study which considered mysticism within the context of one's life. Thus, it was not a consideration of mysticism as a solitary principle, but as an integral aspect of the life of Evelyn Underhill. This added perspective and sensitivity to the study.

The catalyst for an exploration of this nature is the realization that many are aware only of the criticisms and extremes of mysticism. Thus, recognition of the positive aspects through the life of an orthodox saint is not only reasonable, but necessary for the restoration of this term

as a vital Christian concept. The understanding of mysticism which Evelyn Underhill espoused was thoroughly Christian, and thus, thoroughly devoid of the misconceptions often surrounding the term. Therefore, her view can be used to rethink the frequent rejection of mysticism in Christian circles.

Admitted in this study, and by Evelyn Underhill, is the fact that mysticism does have some company who fall prey to imbalances in their mystical pursuits. Unfortunately, the result has been a subjection of mysticism to intense scrutiny, and ultimately complete renunciation. Also determined, however, is that the extremes and/or fallacies of some do not warrant a rejection of the practice by all of Christendom. Moreover, drawing from the positive, orthodox understandings of it as delineated by Evelyn Underhill, quite appropriate and helpful efforts to restore some sense of accuracy, and hence, viability to this way of life is possible.

This study has demonstrated that an English mystic contributed wisdom and truth, as not many are capable, to the annals of church history. Furthermore, her understanding of the spiritual life based on mysticism is food for those hungry for a deeper walk with God. There is nothing abnormal or unorthodox in her expositions on spirituality, and even mysticism in her mature years. In fact, in a world where the church often seems to have lost

its vigor and vitality, her teaching rings with an authenticity that urges us to learn what she knew and lived. Therefore, it is time for Christians to purge themselves of inherent negative predispositions to deeper levels of intimacy with God by affirming the truth of mysticism in Underhill's sense of the word. Untold nuggets of help await those who will dare to study the Christian mystic, Evelyn Underhill, and practice the true mystical way of life.

#### Suggestions for Further Study

Much more can be learned from Evelyn Underhill. The parameters of this thesis have only allowed this study to be a cursory exploration of her life and her conception of mysticism. It is far from exhaustive of the fruits that may be gleaned.

In terms of mystical analysis, numerous areas abound for future scholarship. The first possibility is a more thorough explication of the relationship between mysticism and the spiritual life, and the relationship between mysticism and worship. Also, an important study would be a comparison of Underhill's later concept of mysticism and that of the Baron von Hügel's, as propounded in his two volume set, The Mystical Element of Religion. In addition, almost any comparison/contrast exploration between her concept of mysticism and that of other proponents would be enlightening. Certainly, the possibilities for fruitful study in this area are quite extensive.

This analysis of Evelyn Underhill's concept of mysticism has barely touched the surface of all the wonderful truths to be found in whole gamut of Christian mystical literature. Though, she certainly was one of the most widely known, she is merely one in a pool of many. Numerous others are also deserving of attention. This is not to say that blind adherence to all mystics should be realized. However, it is the hope of this author that studies of this kind (in which genuine Christian mystics are examined) will result in a new perspective toward mysticism. Instead of a reactionary position to the term, perhaps a posture of openness, and receptivity, will become the Church's position.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works by Evelyn Underhill

- Underhill, Evelyn. Concerning the Inner Life with The House of the Soul. London: Methuen & Co., LTD., 1947.
- . "Discussions: Theology and the Subconscious." The Hibbert Journal 9, No.8 (April 1911): 644-646.
- . "Introduction." In Nicholas of Cusa: The Vision of God. 1928. Reprint. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960.
- . "Introduction." In The Cloud of Unknowing. 2nd edition. London: John M. Watkins, 1922.
- . "God and Spirit." Theology 21 (Sept. 1930): 160-170.
- . Immanence: A Book of Verses. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd. [n.d.].
- . Life as Prayer and Other Writings of Evelyn Underhill Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1991.
- . Mixed Pasture: Twelve Essays and Addresses. Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1968.
- . Mysticism. A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness. 1911. Reprint. New York: Doubleday, 1990.
- . "Our Two-Fold Relation to Reality." The Hibbert Journal 23 no. 2 (Jan. 1925): 218-230.
- . Practical Mysticism. 1914. Reprint. Columbus: Ariel Press, 1987.
- . "Problems of Conflict." The Hibbert Journal 13 (April

- 1915): 497-510.
- . "Sources of Power in Human Life." The Hibbert Journal 19 no. 3 (April 1921): 385-400.
  - . The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays. 1920. Reprint. New York: AMS Press, 1976.
  - . The Fruits of the Spirit (1942) Light of Christ (1944) Abba (1940). Reprint in one volume. London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1956.
  - . The Golden Sequence: A Fourfold Study of the Spiritual Life. USA: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1960.
  - . The House of the Soul. London: Methuen & Co. LTD., 1929.
  - . The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today. 1922. Reprint. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986.
  - . The Light of Christ. ed. Lucy Menzies. 1945. Reprint. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., Inc., 1946.
  - . The Mystery of Sacrifice: A Meditation on the Liturgy. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1938.
  - . "The Mystic and the Corporate Life." The Interpreter 2 no. 2 (Jan. 1915): 143-160. Reprinted in The Essentials of Mysticism.
  - . The Mystics of the Church. 1925. Reprint. Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1975.
  - . The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins. 1913. Reprint. Atlanta: Ariel Press, 1992.
  - . "The Possibilities of Prayer." Theology 14 (April



1927): 193-204.

- . The Spiritual Life. 1937. Reprint. Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1955.
- . The School of Charity: Meditations on the Christian Creed. 1934. Reprint. Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1991.
- . "Thoughts on Prayer and the Divine Immanence." The Expository Times 42 no. 9 (June 1931): 405-409. Reprinted in Life as Prayer.
- . Worship. 1936. Reprint. New York: Harper & Brothers, Harper Torchbook, 1957.

#### Other Contributing Works

- Anthony, Susan. "The Spiral and the Synthesis." Spiritual Life 21 no. 2 (1975): 140-146.
- Armstrong, Christopher J. R. Evelyn Underhill: An Introduction to her Life and Writings. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975.
- Barkway, Lumsden. "Evelyn Underhill in Her Writings." In Collected Papers, ed. Lucy Menzies. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1946, 7-34.
- . "Evelyn Underhill." Theology 56 no. 400 (Oct. 1953): 368-372.
- Barrois, George A. "Mysticism--What Is It?" Theology Today 4 (1947): 190-202.
- Bechtle, Regina Marie. "The Mystic and the Church in the Writings of Evelyn Underhill." Ph.D. Diss., Fordham

Univ., 1979.

- Belshaw, G.P. "Introduction." In Lent with Evelyn Underhill. New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1964, 5-7.
- Bodgener, Jonathan Henry. "Evelyn Underhill: Spiritual Director to her Generation." London Quarterly and Holborn Review 183 (Jan. 1958): 46-50.
- Boyack, Alice Selby. "Evelyn Underhill's Interpretation of the Spiritual Life." Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1964.
- Brame, Grace Adolphsen. "Continuing Incarnation: Evelyn Underhill's Double Thread of Spirituality." The Christian Century 107 (Oct. 31, 1990): 997-1000.
- . ed. Evelyn Underhill: The Ways of the Spirit. New York: Crossroad, 1990.
- Browning, Don S. "William James' Philosophy of Mysticism." The Journal of Religion 59 (Jan. 1979): 56-70.
- Campbell, Fay. "Evelyn Underhill's Pleshey." The Living Church 1 (Mar. 1987): 11-13.
- Carloye, Jack C. "The Truth of Mysticism." Religious Studies 16 (Mar 1980): 1-13.
- Corduan, Winfried. Mysticism An Evangelical Option? Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.
- Cox, Michael. Handbook of Christian Spirituality: A Guide to Figure and Teachings from the Biblical Era to the Twentieth Century. Cambridge: Harper & Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1983.

- Cropper, Margaret. Life of Evelyn Underhill. New York: Harper & Bros., 1958.
- Croxall, Thomas H. "Anglicanism and the Incarnation." Scottish Journal of Theology 3 (1950): 242-254.
- Decker, Michael P. "A Hermeneutic Approach to the Problem of Mysticism." Ph.D. Diss., Emory Univ., 1978.
- Deen, Edith. "Evelyn Underhill." Great Women of the Christian Faith. New York: Harper & Row, 1959, 408.
- Donohue, John. "Two in Search of the Spirit." America 7 (August 1976): 52-53.
- Dupre, Louis and Saliers, Don eds. Christian Spirituality: Post Reformation and Modern vol. 3 New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989.
- Edwards, Tilden. Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.
- Egan, Harvey D. An Anthology of Christian Mysticism. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991.
- . "Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticism." Theological Studies 39 (Sept. 1978): 399-426.
- . "Mysticism as a Way of Life I: Evelyn Underhill." What Are They Saying About Mysticism? New York: Paulist Press, 1982, 42-50.
- "Evelyn Underhill, Mystic and Religious Thinker." The Christian Century 23 (July 1941): 925-926; Death Notice, 941.
- Frances, Vaughan. "Characteristics of Mysticism." ReVision

12 (Fall 1989): 23.

Furse, Margaret L. "Mysticism: Classic Modern Interpreters & Their Premise of Continuity." Anglican Theological Review 60 no. 2 (April 1978): 180-193.

---. "Mysticism: Strands in a Perennial Triangle." Religious Life 43 (Winter 1974): 467-477.

---. Mysticism: Window on a World View. Nashville: Abingdon, 1977.

Gardiner, H.C., and Larkin, E.E. "Mysticism." The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967.

Goetz, Joseph. "Evelyn Underhill." In Mirrors of God. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984, 62-79.

Greene, Dana. "Adhering to God: The Message of Evelyn Underhill for Our Times." Spirituality Today (Spring 1987): 22-38.

---. "Bibliography of Works about and by Evelyn Underhill." Bulletin of Bibliography 45 (June 1988): 92-107.

---. "Toward an Evaluation of the Thought of Evelyn Underhill." History of European Ideas 8 no. 4/5 (Spring 1987): 549-562.

Grenz, Stanley J. and Olson, Roger E. 20th Century Theology. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Hammons, Helen Patricia Grady. "The Meaning of Mysticism for Christianity Today." Religious Life 8 no. 3 (Summer 1939): 439-444.

Harkness, Georgia. Mysticism: Its Meaning and Message.

Nashville: Abingdon, 1973.

Hardesty, Nancy A. "Mysticism--Evelyn Underhill." In Christian Spirituality eds. Frank N. Magill and Ian P. McGreal. United States of America: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988, 479-483.

Hinson, Glenn E. Review of The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today (Repr. ed.), by Evelyn Underhill. Review and Expositor: A Baptist Theological Journal 84 (Spring 1987): 328.

Hoffman, John Washington. "Mysticism." Religious Life 4 no. 3 (Summer 1935): 384-396.

Holmes, Urban T. A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction. USA: The Seabury Press, 1980.

Inge, William Ralph. Christian Mysticism. London: Methuen & Co., 1899.

James, William. The Varieties of Religious Experience. New York: Collier, 1961.

Jeffrey, George J. "Practical Mysticism." The Expository Times 63 (1951): 24-26.

Jones, Cheslyn, Wainwright, Geoffrey, and Yarnold, Edward. The Study of Spirituality. London: SPCK, 1986.

Kepler, Thomas S., comp. The Evelyn Underhill Reader. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

King, Winston L. "Negation as a Religious Category." The Journal of Religion 37 (1957): 105-118.

- Krishan, Daya. "Mysticism and the Problem of Intelligibility." The Journal of Religion 34 (1954): 101-105.
- Kristo, Jure. "The Interpretation of Religious Experience: What do Mystics Intend When They Talk about Their Experiences?" Journal of Religion 62 (1982): 21-38.
- Leech, Kenneth. Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977.
- Louth, Andrew. "Mysticism." In The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality. ed. Gordon S. Wakefield. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.
- Marshall, Paul V. "Anglican Spirituality." In Protestant Spiritual Traditions. ed. Frank C. Senn. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.
- Martin, D. D. "Mysticism." In Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984.
- Menzies, Lucy. "Evelyn Underhill, Memoir." In Light of Christ. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1944, 9-22.
- Murphy, Carol. "Evelyn Underhill." In Four Women, Four Windows in Light. Wallingford: Pendle Hill Publications, 1981, 8-15.
- "Mysticism." The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. ed. F.L. Cross. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

- New American Standard Bible. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1979.
- Overall, Christine. "The Nature of Mystical Experience." Religious Studies 18 (Mar 1982): 47-54.
- Paulsell, William O. "Finding a Mystical Perception of Reality." The Christian Century 93 (May 26, 1976): 519- 521.
- Piper, Otto A. "Mysticism and the Christian Experience." Theology Today 10 (July 1953): 156-169.
- Ramsey, Michael. "Evelyn Underhill." Religious Studies 12 (Sept. 1976): 273-279.
- Richardson, Alan and Bowden, John eds. The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.
- Sauvage, George M. "Mysticism." The Catholic Encyclopedia. USA: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1913.
- Smalley, Susan J. "Evelyn Underhill and the Mystical Tradition." In Scripture, Tradition and Reason. eds. R. Bauckham and B. Drewery, 1988.
- Steere, Douglas Van. Doors into Life Through Five Devotional Classics. New York: Harper, 1948.
- . Gleanings: A Random Harvest. Nashville: The Upper Room, 1986.
- . "The Meaning of Mysticism within Christianity." Religious Life 22 no. 4 (Autumn 1953): 515-526.
- . "Underhill, Evelyn (Mrs. Stuart Moore)." The

- Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. Lefferts A. Loetscher (A Supplement of the New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955, 11, 1130.
- . "Underhill, Evelyn (Mrs. Stuart Moore)." Who Was Who. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1952, 4 (1941-1951), 1175.
- . "Underhill, Evelyn." Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature, ed. Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycroft. New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1950, 1431.
- Strunk, Orlo. "The Religious Verses of Evelyn Underhill." Wesleyan Studies in Religion 58 (1965-66): 5-11.
- Tastard, Terry. The Spark in the Soul: Four Mystics on Justice. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989.
- Tavard, George H. "The Christology of the Mystics." Theological Studies 42 (Dec. 1981): 561-579.
- von Hügel, Baron Friedrich. The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her Friends. 2 vols. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1927.
- Williams, Charles, ed. The Letters of Evelyn Underhill. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1943.
- Woods, Robert Gail. "Evelyn Underhill's Concept of Worship." Ph.D. Diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1971.



---. "The Future We Shan't See: Evelyn Underhill's  
Pacifism." The Christian Century 96 (May 16, 1979):  
553-555.

Wyon, Olive. Teachings Toward Christian Perfection:  
Introducing Three Spiritual Classics. USA: Woman's  
Division of Christian Service, 1963.